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Title

War Notes.

Author

Villebois-Mareuil, De.

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# WAR NOTES

## THE DIARY OF COLONEL DE VILLEBOIS-MAREUIL

FROM NOVEMBER 24, 1899, TO APRIL 4, 1900

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of India.

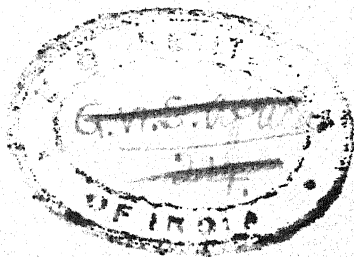
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WITH A PREFACE BY E. M. DE VOGÜÉ

MEMBER OF THE ACADEMIE FRANÇAISE

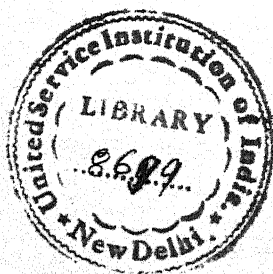
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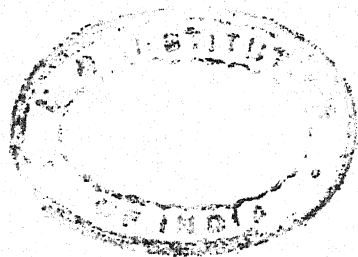
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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

"My whole ambition is limited to remaining what I have ever been—a soldier. Besides, the mould in which a soldier's life is formed is too rigid in France to allow of change, once it has been shaped." This profession of faith I note at the commencement of a letter which Colonel de Villebois-Mareuil sent to *La Liberté* from Pretoria, and it may well serve as a motto for the following Campaign Diary.

These daily notes were written on the roads of the Transvaal and in the haste of bivouacs. Had the narrator any leisure hours? The very capable writer he was will in that case be apparent. When time pressed, the rapid notes became merely

<sup>1</sup> From *La Liberté*.

## WAR NOTES

a clear and substantial staff report. Begun at Lorenzo Marquez on November 14th, 1899, the diary ends on March 7th, 1900—one month before the writer's death, at the time he was forming the little French troop with which he intended to attempt a desperate move. The note-book in which he recorded his last thoughts has not been found.<sup>1</sup> How has it been lost? Has it been mislaid? Or is it in the hands of the enemy? Or, again, is it buried under the hillock at Boshof, near the great heart whence those thoughts sprang?

The portions of the diary which we possess will interest the reader more than a little. They will especially please those who know how to read in them the tragedy of a life. A tragic suggestion, indeed, emanates from these pages, and shows us the kind of man Villebois-Mareuil was, what he sought, and what he found.

And what was he? Part of the wreck-

<sup>1</sup> Incorporated in this edition.

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age of a great shipwreck; an inconsolable victim of public misfortunes, unresigned to accept the decadence of his country and his position in that country. A soldier by birth and vocation, he entered the army with the enthusiastic faith of a young priest who takes orders. At the time he received his first grade, men who wore the epaulet were by universal consent, as old as the French name, glorified above all others; that signal personage, the officer, was a being apart—above honour—in that remarkable nation, France. Soon the war broke out—war, the harvest-time of certain glory, as he thought; and a sole reason for living or dying to officers of his stamp. But in a few weeks part of his high confidence was lost in the disaster of defeat. Only part, however; for on the morrow all hearts regained hope, and all minds were feverishly applied in the coming reparation. Ah! young men readers, how can I make you realise the

atmosphere of those days—that passion which was shared by a whole nation—the besetting passion of the gambler who night and day lives in hope of revenge? Villebois had been promoted to the rank of captain for his gallant behaviour with the army of the Loire; a long and brilliant career opened up before him. He eagerly applied himself to his professional work.

Whilst absorbed in his task, the great obliterator Time was at work also. Early revolt was subjected by habit; the new generation was diverted by other interests. Little by little, the nation departed from that fixed idea to which men like Villebois-Mareuil still held fast. An immobile sentry on the rock of memory, he saw the indifferent sea advance until slowly, surely, it submerged the great hope upon which he lived. His dismayed soul lost the faith which sustained him after the downfall of 1871.

New customs and requirements daily



## INTRODUCTION

modified the military arm : another poignant grief for this defender of tradition. Under the old words in which the transformed organisation is still arrayed he clearly perceived realities ; he saw, looming on the horizon, the logical outcome of our social evolution—a good citizen guard substituted for that mystic family, the army. Unable to fight against the discouragement which overwhelmed him, Colonel de Villebois-Mareuil resigned.

Trying other employments for his activity, he turned to literature and to politics ; but these were but the pastimes of an exile, powerless to divert his regret. As he has so well expressed it, nothing could change his life, once formed in the mould. With an instinctive hereditary movement he ever sought at his side for the beloved sword ; and when the African Vendée presented to all who were free and devoted the attraction of a noble cause to be served, he felt it quiver. The

temptation was too strong for this up-rooted soldier. A prisoner of a humdrum existence, of the life of the civilian, actionless, free from danger, inglorious, without authority, he set out as a captive escapes from his prison.

But to be more correct—he took the cross. “I then set out from Joinville,” narrates the good seneschal, “and did not again set foot in the castle until my return. . . . I did not wish to turn my eyes on Joinville, in order that my heart might not be softened by the fine castle I was leaving behind, and the thought of my two children.” Do we not seem to hear in these words our contemporary who fled to the wars also without seeing his family, without even embracing the daughter he left under their charge? He took the cross—that is the phrase we must ever use in speaking of men of this lineage. They still answer, after so many centuries, to the call of ancestors who went to the

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Holy Sepulchre. Their modern crusades have changed in name and in object: they go to emancipate America with La Fayette, to liberate Greece with Fabvier; to defend the Boers with Villebois-Mareuil. Wherever a cry of distress rises, it is ever the same enthusiasm which carries them there, the same quest of a knightly ideal; the same impatience to shed for the unfortunate the generous blood of France.

Alas! the same disillusionment everywhere awaits them. It is apparent on every page of the Colonel's diary. We can imagine ourselves reading once more the similar narrations brought back from Greece—eighty years ago—by our disabused philhellenists. True, Villebois-Mareuil met in the Transvaal most brave men, who welcomed him with touching sympathy; and to their virtues and heroism he renders homage. But one cannot help feeling that there was never a thorough understanding nor even intellectual union

between the European officers and these peasants of another world and another age.

The Boers are feudal vassals. "In their ideas and in their methods," he says, "everything is out of date." Methods of warfare which he came to teach them were so much Greek. He was distressed at this "immobile warfare." The slightest offensive action, he explained over and over again, would have overwhelming results. But he spoke to the deaf! Colonel de Villebois-Mareuil experienced the enervation of a good player who sees his partners, with all the trumps in their hands, lose a magnificent game. A chief without troops, yet eager for action, he wandered among the Boer camps as an unattached officer. Constantly making daring reconnaissances on his own account, he brought back advice which was listened to deferentially, but which was never followed. Routine was too strong for them.

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Routine and political prudence—that is what paralyses command in this warlike Republic. “Politics play a great part in all military decisions; leaders shirking responsibility. . . . A kind of habit of appealing to universal suffrage, which perpetually hampers plans owing to the necessity for making them in conformity with the general wish, imparts incoercible timidity to the Boer command.” Villebois returns twenty times to the two causes which sterilise such bravery and devotion: fear of responsibility in the case of the generals, and the suspicious individualism of the soldier. The latter leaves the battlefield before the end of a decisive engagement, to rest in the bosom of his family; he puts himself on a footing of equality with his chiefs. All the portraits of Boer generals given in the diary resemble each other in one respect—their indecision and their dislike at giving orders. The narrator gives full expression

to his thought when he goes as far as to say that these leaders, these burgher politicians "represent fairly accurately what MM. — would be if given the white-feathered hat and placed at the head of our squadrons." The blank was filled in with the names of some of our most typical parliamentarians.

The only exception he made was the case of Botha. As to the intrepid De Wet, he had not yet met him.

Do not think that our compatriot is unjust to the exemplary people who await death behind their kopjes, and, before surrendering their native land, stoically suffer it. No; what exasperates him is the absurdity of this waiting, the continual subordination to the convenience of a beaten adversary, who, however, rules the movements of the conqueror; it is the uselessness of these splendid sacrifices, and all for want of a little discipline and strategy. Villebois feels bewildered, lost,

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like a thoroughbred trammelled in the midst of a troop of oxen; and he sees them going to the slaughter-house with slow step instead of dashing on the drover who pushes them there.

His intellectual and moral isolation appears clearly in his description of Christmas night. At that time, when hearts feel the necessity for closer union in an effusion of recollections and sentiments in common, with whom does he drink fraternally a glass of champagne? With his friends the Boers, whom he has come to aid? No; with German officers—the inveterate enemy he has ever dreamt of fighting. He, himself, is astonished at finding under their tents but a faint odour of the fatherland and of the race. That was because, in spite of everything, they were of his own family—Europeans, officers nourished on the same culture and devotees of the same military cult.

Colonel de Villebois-Mareuil went first

of all to Natal, at the time the Republicans had but to will and the enemy would have been precipitated into the Tugela. Ladysmith lay under the hand like a ripe fruit. He tried to teach Joubert, and to rally those commandos which were taking root on their positions; but it was labour lost. His arguments were approved, but not a foot was moved. Discouraged on that side, he made for the other frontier, in the direction of Kimberley. There, also, a vigorous attack was all that was needed to capture the town at its last extremity. Cronje, however, was as refractory as Joubert to all tactical suggestions: he gave way before the English, allowed himself to be surrounded; like the others he could only be sublime through abnegation, and courage in misfortune which he knew not how to avert. On March 4th, Villebois sums up his impressions of the campaign and the military temperament of the Boers. The appreciations dictated by his



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experience will be found to contrast singularly with accredited opinions with us. He concludes with these words: "Disaster appears certain; it is but a question of hours."

Thus he considered the situation hopeless when, at last, he was able to form that small independent column—some sixty Frenchmen and Europeans — with which he wished to give the lesson in offensive warfare before it was too late. When he took command, he had but one object in view, one pre-eminent thought which appears many times between the lines of his diary. This thought was no longer for the Boers, but for France and her army. He had sworn to leave in the depths of Africa an imperishable recollection of French bravery; he had resolved to show all—friends or foes—how the soldiers of his nation could die. He kept his resolution at Boshof.

If we owed to him only this testamentary

## WAR NOTES

document, his sacrifice would not have been in vain. This capital deposition will correct certain erroneous and dangerous infatuations in France. The resistance of the Boers, when they seemed invincible, encouraged the partisans of volunteering, and similar idle fancies. A competent eye-witness tells us the sole reason for those partial successes: they were due solely to the prodigious incapacity of an adversary who was quite as poor a tactician as the Boers themselves. Though possessed of moral virtues very rare amongst the democracies of the old world, a physical training and a science of marksmanship such as are found with no other people, the citizen-soldiers and improvised generals of the veldt would not have withstood a few well-disciplined, seasoned regiments, vigorously led. An army ever so poorly drilled would have overthrown them at the first shock. Villebois clearly saw this, and explicitly says that in spite of their

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admirable personal qualities these poor burghers were at a disadvantage, at the outset, not only because of the numbers of their enemy but owing to their own want of cohesion, discipline, and command. Such is the opinion of the excellent military critic who offered them his life, and who did not succeed in enlightening them.

Let us listen to the witness who speaks here with the double authority of his life and his death. Readers will excuse these preliminary lines: they explain the origin and the signification of a document—they do not pretend to remind any one in France with what pious respect we ought to hearken to the posthumous voice of the hero of Boshof. I have been asked to render a last homage to Colonel de Villebois-Mareuil. I have accepted the duty, but almost regret it, having too great a sense of the weakness and vanity of my words compared to these manly actions. On

his tomb, buried in the African bush, one verse of the Book of Maccabees—that referring to Judas—need be engraved: “Through him spread the glory of his people; he was named to the extremities of the earth, and he brought together those who perish.”

E. M. DE VOGÜÉ,

*Member of the Académie Française.*



## WAR NOTES

*November 24, 1899.* — Departure from Lorenzo Marquez.

The railroad followed a crook of the bay, and soon entered a flat country covered with scrub, stunted trees, reeds, and, here and there, dense clumps of dwarfed palms. Then the jungle thickened; the grass became harsh and cutting. The plain was intersected by streams, the questionable water of which disappeared amidst the tall grass. The country was verdant.

A cloud of locusts passed, raining on the train as in Algeria. The stagnant streams make the whole country unhealthy.

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The grass is dangerous for horses. At the stations little Kaffirs approached with cages of birds.

There were five Germans in our train—probably military men. We could see immense wooded spaces and deserts, which would be a magnificent hunting-ground, since the lion is still found there, if they were not infested by the tsetse. Small hillocks indicated ant-hills. Giraffes are fairly numerous, although the railway has driven these timid animals farther afield.

An army wishing to reach the Transvaal by setting out from Delagoa would suffer much from malaria and lack of drinking water. It would be impossible for it to sojourn in these infected solitudes.

The railway, however, follows a fine clear river with flat banks. Along the route the train deposited provisions. Good negroes, clothed in strangely-assorted European dress, joined it.

The frontier is reached at Komati Poort.

## ARRIVAL AT KOMATI

When crossing the Komati by an iron bridge, we had a welcome surprise at seeing a French flag floating above a distillery, the owner of which keeps the refreshment room at the railway station.

The Customs was precise and minute; but sympathetically, familiarly so. They made me give my word that my harness-box contained nothing dutiable, and they hardly looked at one of my flasks. On the other hand, passports were carefully examined; and this operation led to the rejection of two foreigners. Arms were seized; but they allowed me to keep my sword and revolver.

The descent was rapid. On the horizon in front of us lay stupendous mountains. We flew along a plateau. Thorny trees were interspersed on a kind of prairie, like certain orchards in parts of Northern Africa and Southern Spain. Then a superb arena of mountains came in view. And again

the train dashed along an immense wooded plain.

A boy of sixteen got into our compartment. He was a Boer, and, assisted by two comrades, he had just escorted twenty-five English prisoners—stokers, engineers, etc. The soldiers, numbering 1560, remain at Pretoria. The young men have taken charge of the police and escort service. Polite, simple, not at all bumptious, these Boers are astonishingly calm in time of success. But they are enraged against the English.

Over the red earth were scattered small shrubs, bushes, tufts of jungle grass, and around, bare mountains covered with huge blocks, and as though formed of conglomerate rocks, wooded but uninhabited plateaus which are splendid places for big game, though unfortunately they are infected with fever by the rivers crossing them. This country will become a terrible cemetery if its defence is prolonged.



## AT WATERVAL ONDER

We entered a defile in the rocky, jungle-covered mountains. The river was to the right; the railroad forty feet above; the mountains sloped down to the streams at an angle of sixty degrees. It would have been impossible for a troop to pass.

After Nelspruit station, the plateau extended out of sight, with little hillocks on the horizon. Here and there was a patch of green, scrub, or a river flowing between woods.

All the railway stations were surrounded with eucalyptus trees. We might have imagined ourselves on the Algiers railway if the elegant neatness of the Transvaal had not strikingly contrasted with Algerian slovenliness.

*November 25.* — Waterval Onder. — We have dined and passed the night at the house of a Frenchman, M. Mathis, who has established here a fine factory, with a hotel, plantations, and garden, not counting a

dwelling-house in the mountains. Friendly, intelligent, active, much appreciated in the Transvaal, where he does honour to his country, our host received us cordially. Thanks to him, we have again had true French cooking—priceless in South Africa.

I wandered in the plantations after dinner. The night was splendid, and the stars shone brilliantly. The eucalytus-scented air was so pure and so fresh that I asked myself if I had not come to Africa to take a cure of air. I experienced the buoyancy one feels at great altitudes. On the other hand, however, far from the drowsiness of the sea, I sleep lightly and await the dawn with impatience.

At eight in the morning, departure. By means of grappling apparatus the train mounted the rocky barrier which separated us from the high plateaus. We entered a superb defile, formed of mountains which seemed like walls of a fortress supporting green declivities. At the bottom rushed

## SUNDAY AT PRETORIA

the torrent, yellow with the sand which it carried along. Then we left the last trees behind us, reaching the region of pastures and Boer farms and Watervalboven, where is an English hotel, which shares with that of M. Mathis the patronage of travellers. There arrived there yesterday evening a small convoy of prisoners expelled from Johannesburg. They were guarded during their dinner at the hotel by young Boers, then shut up again for the night in their railway carriages. They were silent and thoughtful.

*November 26.*—Sunday at Pretoria is a day of complete rest; there is not the least diversion. But for the friendliness of M. Aubert, the French Consul, and his family, who took possession of me from ten in the morning until ten at night, I should have had nothing to do. When I stepped from the train yesterday I received the warmest welcome from him and Mlle. Aubert, who is thoroughly French like her father,

speaks Dutch as he does, and puts her energy and devotion into everything that may benefit France, and make our country liked and understood.

I stopped at the Grand Hôtel, which is very luxurious and comfortable, and slept profoundly, for the journey had greatly fatigued me. This morning, after attending mass at a convent, I awaited the visit of Holboom and the Consul, whose advice was full of interest to me. I see that I shall only make myself useful by being very simple and reserved, and that my advice at the outset must be given in the least pressing manner. I think, however, that with tact and perseverance I shall render some service to the Boers.

On General Joubert's staff are three or four ex-officers of the German army, with whom I shall probably take up my quarters, and good quarters without a doubt.

I took luncheon at M. Aubert's, and in

## RETROSPECTION

conversation with him got a very precise knowledge of operations. The Executive Council was to have sent the ultimatum on October 2nd, but it waited until the 9th, the mobilisation of the Free State not being completed. By the 11th the period of hostilities had virtually opened. Mr. Conyngham Greene presented his letters of recall to the Government; martial law was proclaimed, and orders given to the Boer troops to invade Natal and Becuanaland. On October 12th, General Joubert entered Natal by Laing's Nek. A Boer commando marched from Vryheid on Dundee, with Colenso as its ulterior object, whilst a Free State commando went by the Van Reenen Pass in order to outflank Ladysmith, the object of Joubert's operations.

Engagements took place on and after the 20th. At Elandslaagte General Kock retreated because of numerical inferiority; but the German and Dutch corps in not following the Boers' example were outflanked, so he had to go to their assist-

ance, and in consequence was defeated and wounded.

On October 11th General Cronje, the same who arrested Jameson, crossed the Becuana-land frontier, and destroyed the Rhodesian railroad, on which was a dynamite train, which exploded. The train had been abandoned by the driver with the object of blowing up the Boers, but the plan did not succeed. Cronje then captured an armoured train, and advanced on Mafeking. The Boers of the Orange Free State marched on Kimberley, got possession of the water conduits, and blew up the Vaal and South Modder bridges.

On the 20th, Major Lucas Meyer, with 600 Boers, attacked 4000 English at Dundee; but, not receiving the help he expected, retreated after ten hours' fighting, taking one gun, nine English officers, and 175 hussars.

On the 21st General Kock, with a force of 700 men, including the German corps

## RETROSPECTION

of Johannesburg, and the Dutch corps of Pretoria, was attacked at Elandslaagte by the Ladysmith and Dundee troops, and defeated. Seeing the enemy's superiority the Boers had retreated, but the Germans and Dutch held their ground, and asked for reinforcements. Kock made the mistake of listening to them instead of repeating the order to retreat. Result: 183 Boers, Germans and Dutch taken prisoner, and many of them wounded, including Kock, who died. The British losses at Dundee and Elandslaagte (General Symons) were: killed, 3 superior officers, 3 subalterns, 46 privates; wounded: 6 superior officers, 16 captains, 15 lieutenants, 26 non-commissioned officers, and 175 soldiers.

When the Boers took Dundee they found 300 dead and 190 wounded. The prisoners, consisting of 9 officers and 200 privates, were sent to Pretoria, where they were received without a cry, and very well treated. The Boer prisoners at Ladysmith were insulted.

The English soldiers are quartered in the enclosure of the racecourse, whilst the officers are lodged in a building intended for the exhibits which the Transvaal proposed to send to the Paris Exhibition. They asked for a football with which to amuse themselves, and the Boers immediately granted their request.

During operations the English have abused the use of the white flag, either to get their troops out of a difficulty, or on the fallacious pretext of protecting the women and children.

At Ladysmith the English had seven batteries, four cavalry regiments, four infantry regiments, one company of engineers, companies of mounted infantry, strengthened by infantry and a mountain battery, making a total of 16,000 men. The investment of Ladysmith took place on the night of October 29-30. The Royal Irish Fusiliers and the Gloucester regiment, which attempted a sortie with the 10th mountain battery,



## RETROSPECTION

were surrounded and taken prisoners. The Boers captured 5 guns, 42 officers and 1200 men, who have been shut up in Pretoria.

The losses up to November 1st were : on the side of the English, 5500 killed and wounded ; on the side of the Boers, 500, including the prisoners taken at Elandslaagte.

Mafeking has been very well defended by Colonel Baden-Powell, with a force of 3000 men. Notwithstanding the capture of two small forts, and a bombardment, the town still holds out. A strong body of Free State soldiers guards the northern frontier.

The following simple fact will give an idea of the unworthy behaviour of the English. On October 30th the soldiers of a regiment of lancers rushed on the Boers who had surrendered, or who were wounded, shouting : "No mercy for you, damned Boers !" Hearing of this abominable act, the Boers were, naturally, indignant. But they were soon to take their revenge. A body of 700

Free-Staters being near Modderspruit, to the north-west of Ladysmith, their leader ordered them to let the English troops, who were attempting a sortie, approach, and only to fire a few shots so as to give an impression that the position was only weakly defended. The lancers set out, and when within three hundred and twenty yards, were received with a deadly volley, which inflicted heavy losses. Thrice they returned, but without noticing that an enveloping movement was surrounding them. With the exception of five, all were killed. This occurrence produced a considerable impression at Ladysmith, and the cavalry now refuses to leave the town. Since, fighting has been almost exclusively limited to cannonades. A sortie was made on the 15th, but the English were beaten back. General Joubert has allowed the wounded, the women and the children to leave and camp outside the town.

A flying column, sent in a southerly direction, has occupied Colenso, on the

## INTERVIEW WITH REITZ

Tugela, and has advanced to Estcourt, which is strongly fortified, and covers Moritzberg. It has captured an armoured train and a Maxim, and has taken 55 prisoners, of whom two are officers and one is a journalist, the eldest son of the late Lord Randolph Churchill. The English, in addition, had 10 killed and 14 wounded. The Boers had a few men slightly wounded.

Commandos have crossed the frontier south of the Free State, and have taken Colesberg, Aliwal North, Burgersdorp, and Albert Junction; they have been received enthusiastically. The English are thinking first of all of relieving Kimberley because Cecil Rhodes is shut up there.

*November 27.*—I have to-day seen Mr. Reitz, Secretary of State. He has accepted my services, and told me to consider myself from the present as the guest of the Government; but he does not wish to send me "to the front," as the Boers say, without an

introducer, who will be charged to pass me through the lines. I have also seen the French Consul of Johannesburg, and he has invited me to go to see him, kindly proposing to show me over the mines. I have accepted, and shall leave to-morrow with Holboom, returning in the evening. I awaited the exit of President Kruger. Policemen on foot stood in line, and mounted police faced the Government Palace.

The President left, saluted, and stepped into his carriage. The figure was the one we know so well, with spectacles and a tall hat!

The British plan of campaign shapes itself on the great lines every one foresaw, as follows :—

*1st Division.*—General Lord Methuen; base, Capetown; advanced base, De Aar Junction; line of operations, Rhodesian railroad.

*2nd Division.*—Sir Cornelius Clery; base,

## BRITISH PLANS

Port Elizabeth ; advanced base, Colesberg or Nauwpoort ; line of operations, Port Elizabeth, Bloemfontein, Pretoria.

*3rd Division.*—Sir William Gatacre ; base, East London ; advanced base, Stormberg ; halt near Molteno ; movement on Bethulie to rally the 2nd, or Aliwal North.

Finally, Sir George White will, according to the first plan, keep Durban as his base, and Ladysmith as his advanced base ; but it is probable he will not be allowed to take part in it. This plan, with four columns and a goal as far off as Pretoria and Johannesburg, reminds one of that of Lord Chelmsford when Zululand was invaded ; it will bring great disasters on those who undertake it if the Boers know how to work interior lines, and courageously throw themselves between these columns.

Radical steps have been taken to facilitate the war. All hostile foreigners, though they scarcely interfered, have been sent away,

## WAR NOTES

with the result that the territory was evacuated before the declaration of war. The negro population employed in the mines has been dismissed and thrown in a mass into Portuguese possessions. The Transvaal Government sent away those without money, free of charge; but the Portuguese authorities refused to allow these unfortunate people to get into the train without paying, and they had to walk the fifty-five miles of scrub and marsh which lie between the frontier station and Lorenzo.

The mines have been sequestrated (with the exception of eight, which are worked by the Government), a special police force protecting them against any damage. Railway travelling is forbidden except to those provided with special permits. Traffic in Johannesburg is forbidden after seven o'clock in the evening in the case of the black population, and after nine o'clock in the case of white inhabitants. All the bars have been closed, or, rather, all sale of wine or

## REMARKABLE RECOVERIES

alcohol has been forbidden in hotels, in clubs, and in public-houses. The last-named have, therefore, closed their doors. I was astonished at the hotel to hear everybody asking for mineral water, or pure water, and it was then the enigma was explained.

People here are fundamentally soldiers, and everything passes without a word. It is perhaps wearisome in the long run, but very practical in time of war.

A medical practitioner, with whom I had travelled, expressed a wish to come here, in the belief that as much as £3 a day was given to foreign doctors. This is not so. Up to now there have been only 90 killed and 200 wounded on the side of the Boers, and sanitary resources, in which private charity has so freely given assistance, have been multiplied. There are seriously wounded men in the ambulance to which Mlle. Aubert, the daughter of the French Consul, is attached, who will get over their troubles with the greatest ease. There is something

## WAR NOTES .

so extraordinary here—the air, or the blood of the Boers?—that cures astound the doctors.

*November 28.*—We arrived at Johannesburg yesterday evening. Entering the district of the mines at night time, one is struck by the intensity of human life suggested by those long lines of electric lights, marking the shafts whose soul, as it were, they represent at the hour when, owing to absence of movement, they seem plunged in death. At long intervals emerge in the darkness the skeleton of a scaffolding, a tall chimney, a line of workmen's houses. After nine o'clock at night one must have a special authorisation to walk about the streets of Johannesburg, an authorisation which is distinct from the railroad permit granted by the police to travellers who wish to take train.

M. Hofer, formerly a naval officer, but now general secretary of the Oceana, a large company which is connected with the Mozambique and South-East African Companies,



## AT JOHANNESBURG

offered me hospitality in a sumptuous house, which, as vehicles no longer circulate at night, we reached on foot. Profound solitude reigned, and if we had not met the police, who stopped us on our way, we might have imagined ourselves in a dead city.

With people whose English habits and trade have been disturbed, the current of ideas here is rather British. At Pretoria the way in which the railway company had effected the movements of the Boers, and their rapidity of departure, was praised ; but at Johannesburg people are less enthusiastic, and consider its effort most unusual.

I visited yesterday the workshops of this company, and found them remarkably well kept. One could see it was doing its utmost for the Boer Government ; making ambulance waggons and gun-carriages. There was a fair quantity of *matériel* shunted, including loaded trucks and some meagre prizes from Natal, but amongst them a new carriage which the owner will await

## WAR NOTES

probably until doomsday. As regards military matters, the Belmont fight was being talked about, and as the details come to hand it becomes more and more difficult to know the result. It appears, however, that the Boers, too weak numerically, have lost the position, and that the English are approaching Kimberley. General Cronje makes in that direction. But with what force? The British losses—even reduced to 1500—are greatly exaggerated.

As the Consul awaited me this morning, M. Hofer drove me to his house, distances in this town, built on English colonial measurements, being great. The place was asleep; shops closed and barricaded; inhabitants as though vanished; villas closed. M. Tolomias took me to the Ferreira Mine, the management of which, after the departure of the English manager and staff, was taken over by M. Walker, a French engineer, and Inspector of Mines for the Transvaal.

## VISIT TO A GOLD MINE

Sympathetic, intelligent, thoroughly French, he has reorganised everything; he obtains at the present time the same output, and has even bettered the conditions of working. The mine is one of the eight working for the Boer Government; it is one of the oldest and best. I visited two shafts. The mineral is brought up in a cage by a steam-engine, and transportation is effected in small waggons worked by electricity. The first operation is the crushing of the mineral by means of stamps which pulverise it. The dust is then passed over mercury, the amalgam retaining sixty per cent of the gold. The residuum is taken in waggons to the cyanuration works, where, by precipitates, thirty per cent more gold is extracted. The remainder is obtained by electricity: the residuum is passed through batteries, the lead retaining the gold, which alone remains after its volatilisation. Finally, as elements mixed with pyrites escape all these methods, the residuum is sent for chlorination to the

## WAR NOTES

Robinson Mine, which carries out this operation for all the mines. All these operations, done mechanically by the aid of receivers, elevatory machines, washings, and chemical precipitates, are controlled to infinity by chemists, permitting one to affirm that all the gold save an infinitesimal proportion is extracted from the mineral. Even the water—precious at this altitude and obtained by dams which, after the laying of concrete, transform holes sunk in the ground into huge cisterns—is recovered and purified of the mud with which it has become contaminated.

A grand luncheon in my honour was given by the Consul to the leading members of the French colony. My neighbours at table were M. Duval, who now looks after the interests of all the mines, and M. Hofer.

I have visited the French Ambulance. Forty-seven beds have been installed—thanks to the devotion of the Consul and the Colony—at the house of the Frères

## VISIT TO A GOLD MINE

Maristes, whose schools in ordinary times receive 800 pupils of all religions and nationalities. The president, Mme. de Ferrière, a very distinguished and amiable lady, received us and aroused our admiration in the interesting organisation of this improvised hospital.

The mine was visited at night. I descended by ladders into the first gallery, now almost exhausted, and then by the cage into the last, at a depth of 1500 feet. Every 400 yards or so, between the two galleries, are tunnels in which, in a long line, the blacks bore the rock for the placing of the dynamite. Depth and direction are indicated to them. When their work is done they leave. Generally, the pay for seven or eight men, fed and lodged, is two shillings a day. The dynamite is placed by the whites when the work is done, and is exploded whilst the day and night men are coming to the surface—that is, twice in twenty-four hours. The earth is thus cut away more and more closely

## WAR NOTES

between the two galleries, and the use of dynamite is not abandoned until only pillars are left, which, with the planking, support the roof.

Auriferous is easily recognised from sterile mineral by the brilliancy of the quartz.

*November 29.*—Departure from Johannesburg at seven o'clock. We got a very picturesque view of the long lines of chimneys and shafts which follow the lode to a great distance from the town. The train was packed. My companions were an artillery captain, who is a grandson of President Kruger, and an amiable secretary of the Johannesburg Red Cross, who spoke French fluently, and gave me some particulars about Ladysmith, whence he had come. He told me that Generals Cronje and Delarey had just defeated, on the Modder River, the English relief corps sent to Kimberley. General Delarey wrote: "I have eleven killed and wounded, including

## PREPARATIONS FOR DEPARTURE

my eldest son, who died this morning." General Joubert is getting ready for a fight at Colenso with the enemy from Estcourt.

*November 30.*—Waiting at Pretoria.

*December 1.*—I have to-day seen my introducer to General Joubert—Mr. Edward Rooth, a charming man, who has kindly undertaken to find me a boy. I went with him to buy stable utensils, shackles, etc., after which he took me to his club, and had me inscribed as an honorary member. Only a khaki suit to buy, and then I am ready to leave.

I have made the acquaintance of a French household established in the Transvaal for ten years. M. Jacques, the husband, is a workman upholsterer who has saved money, and is in easy circumstances. He related to me the exodus of the English, and told me that English workmen spend all their salary and save nothing.

## WAR NOTES

A visit to Sunnyside, the villa quarter of Pretoria, showed me that, though pretty and flowery, it is not cheerful, probably because almost all the trees are willows and cypresses.

We are now in the fruit season ; but fruit, though excellent, is scarce.

The beginning of December here is equivalent to the end of May in France.

*December 8.*—Invited to the Club by Mr. Rooth. I had luncheon there with Mr. Reitz, M. Aubert, and Mr. Stewart. Their amiability to everybody is extreme, and it is a pleasure to me to set out under their auspices.

Mr. Reitz has done me a great honour in troubling himself over me when overwhelmingly burdened with work. A very intelligent, well-educated man, speaking French sufficiently, and knowing our history well! He was enthusiastically eulogistic of Richelieu *à propos* of a certain Plessis, a



## BOERS AND PROTESTANTISM

French refugee in the Transvaal, whom he believed was related to the great cardinal in his ascendancy. The revocation of the Edict of Nantes ever weighs on the minds of the Boers; any reaction against the protestants is cruel to them. My new friends made allusion to this in regard to the Dreyfus Case. It is somewhat difficult to get them to admit that there is a considerable difference between the foreign protestants who have come into France and our French protestants—a distinction which is not made sufficiently clear in our country, where the tendency is to generalise. The Boers are also much taken up with the Jewish question. But it must be remembered there are two Jews here, M. Grünberg and M. Léon, engineers of the Creusot works, who serve the French cause with undaunted devotion and intelligence.

The Boers are above all free men, conscious of their rights, fearless against authority in

## WAR NOTES

defence of those rights, but respectful when the interest of the fatherland is at stake, and on every occasion ready to die for their independence.

Differences in regard to position are to be seen in the Transvaal, and there is even a sort of aristocracy based on services rendered the country by such men as Pretorius and Kruger; but there are no class distinctions, no distance between the poorest and the richest. This moral equality exists in the ranks, as I found in the case of artillerymen. Respectful to his superior officer and very military, the simple gunner remains a free man, and preserves his dignity even in a state of subordination. Thus, Papenfus, the orderly whom Mr. Rooth has given me, is a relative of Major Erasmus of the artillery, and of many influential people in Pretoria. Whilst acting as a companion when under fire, he will perform those duties which I escape owing to my rank; but if I were a Boer, we

## EQUALITY OF THE BOERS

should be equal and on the same footing at the end of the war. Officers, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers—tall and well built—are all excellent horsemen. The officers do not pass through the ranks, but are appointed by examination, their social condition being taken into account. That does not occasion difficulty, granting their equality as men, which continues even to the artillery camp, where the Kaffirs look after the horses and do fatigue duty.

After luncheon I called on the Government to settle about my orderly, and to get the best map of the country. Matters are arranged as amongst people of the same society, who grant everything because they are in complete accord as regards station, habits, and sentiments. Solicitors at ministries, against whom we in France raise up *chevaux-de-frise* as against dangerous and devouring wild beasts, are unknown in Pretoria.

## WAR NOTES

Then I had a ride with Lieutenant Krone, setting out from the artillery camp. We called at Mr. Rooth's for his horse, and found the house at the bottom of Sunnyside was a delicious place—most comfortable, and buried in flowers. I saw all our flowers and plants there: roses, hortensias, sunflowers, hibiscus, ferns, dracæna, maiden-hair, dahlias, etc.

Splendid roads, along which are villas shaded by linden trees, eucalyptus, cypresses and willows, run in all directions around Pretoria. Far away in the distance we could see mountains of indescribable clearness. We galloped over the ruddy, ferruginous earth, indeed worthy of bearing those iron-sides who fight for her. At last we reached a river of crystal, where our horses slaked their thirst, and struck the springs of Pretoria, forming a belt of running water, for an ideally beautiful park of fruit and willow trees. In the centre of a little lake was an immense willow, at the

## A VISIT TO KRUGER

extremities of the branches of which an entire republic of yellow birds had suspended its nests, which hung down like fruit, just like little dried cocoanuts in their filamentous and woody covering.

At this spot, exquisite for its shade and its waters (amongst the two or three most reputed waters in the world), is an inn, and a pretty Jewess, with admirable eyes and teeth, who makes no mystery of them to those she serves. On the walls is a humorous inscription written in all idioms.

As, on returning to Pretoria, I had confessed to not having dared to get introduced to the President, I was taken straight to his villa, which is only distinguishable by two marble lions and some white-helmeted policemen. We found Mr. Kruger wearing the inevitable tall hat, big coat, and black spectacles, seated under his verandah alone with his thoughts, and, that evening, in a sad mood because of assassinations, in which

## WAR NOTES

several of his friends had lost their lives, committed by blacks near Rustenberg.

He has a deep voice; thinks justly and quickly; has the authority which comes of deep thought and indomitable energy. He shook hands with me; questioned me through Mr. Rooth; and showed himself affectionate towards my companions, amongst whom is the head judge of Pretoria, a charming and distinguished man. We sat around him quite simply, almost familiarly. He spoke with energy and severity; very bitter against the English, whom he hates like poison, and whose language, which he pretends not to understand, he knows quite well. Above all, he expressed himself briefly, precisely, and without emphasis; his words revealing neither fear nor hope. He was implacable and sorrowful because he was at his post of duty; no success could appease the sadness caused him by his country's losses. The false statements of the English newspapers exasperated him,

## A VISIT TO KRUGER

and he asked me if they were reproduced in France. I replied that, notwithstanding our sympathy for the Transvaal, our cable was at the mercy of the English cable ; but I hoped to take back to France the materials for a book which would throw a true light on events, and my first care on returning home would be to write it.

When I returned to my hotel I was accompanied there by everybody, for courtesy here is unequalled. I passed before the tall granite pedestal which awaits President Kruger's statue. Work upon it was suspended on account of the war, and Sir Redvers Buller may appropriate it if the English are conquerors. But I believe that Kruger will not give up his pedestal, and the South Africans for a long time to come will uncover before the bronze figure of the man who gave them their independence.

*December 3.*—Took luncheon at the house

## WAR NOTES

of Mr. Philip, who owns the monopoly for smokeless powder.

Met in front of the church, after evening prayer, a Dutch Father of the Oblats de Marie, chaplain to the Sisters of Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, who have a large educational establishment frequented by children of all religions, as at the Maristes of Johannesburg, and amongst whom are many Jewish scholars. I got the Sisters to show me the presbytery and the grounds of the mission opposite. The missionaries are somewhat English in their sympathies, because it is from the English and not the Boer element that subsidies and facilities may come. The Boers are sectarians.

*December 4.*—I made the acquaintance of feminine society to-day when paying farewell visits, and found it very agreeable. It adopts English habits—looks after its comfort, loves flowers, takes photographs, drinks tea and iced beverages. The ladies—almost



## EN ROUTE FOR THE FRONT

all deprived of their husbands—visit each other for five o'clock tea.

Mr. Rooth being retained by the Government for a mission, I am leaving with one of his friends, Mr. Sauer, a barrister, who takes charge of the Commissariat Department, and proposes to take enough with us to feed an army.

I have been to say good-bye to the Oblats, and on calling on Mr. Rooth gave myself indigestion, through politeness, by eating apricots in his magnificent garden. He grows fruit in large quantities—strawberries, peaches, apricots, pears, apples, figs, almonds, and grapes,—and the trees, so astounding in their growth, are as fine as they would be with us after thirty years, though it is only eight years since he purchased his ground. Everything — poultry - yard, kennels, and stables,—is very intelligently fitted up.

*December 5.*—Left at 6.30 A.M. The horses were put on the train at five o'clock by

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## WAR NOTES

Papenfus, my orderly. Mr. Sauer, my new friend and companion, got his into the train almost at the moment it started. This is done by means of a platform, as naturally as though it was a matter of getting a dog into a compartment. Mr. Rooth brought me 75 lbs. of apricots; the hotel made me up a provision basket, so we lunched comfortably. Mr. Sauer's provisions loaded a compartment to themselves.

We had a conversation in English with some officer-telegraphists on the subject of hunting, and they told us that jackals, red and silver wolves, three species of panthers, leopards, antelopes, etc., are found here.

The country, with its mimosas and eucalyptus, is very beautiful. The soil is red, as in Algeria. Cattle and sheep succeed admirably. Pasture-land is excellent, but in spring a venomous grass which kills live-stock grows in certain parts.

Leaving the Johannesburg mines to the west, coal-mines are found in abundance,

## EN ROUTE FOR THE FRONT

side by side with the gold-mines, as though to enable the precious metal to be got under the easiest conditions.

We had our luggage with us, and our horses were near at hand; my orderly was in a first-class carriage; each freely settled himself down for his greatest convenience, the management here exercising no meddling surveillance.

We were in a country of grassy plateaus from Johannesburg to Heidelberg, but there it began to be mountainous. Rain fell. Scattered over the green prairies were little mounds: ant-hills in which armies of red and black ants manœuvred one against the other.

*December 6.*— Everything is done with extraordinary ease. Yesterday evening we visited a forage-store, and on informing the commissary of my rank, he told me to take what I wanted. The horses were taken out of their van to drink, after which they returned at a bound and commenced eating

## WAR NOTES

the straw, full of oats, which was thrown to them in little bundles.

It rained in torrents. After dining we made our beds for the night. Everybody was up at dawn. Many travellers got into the train. There were introduced to me a member of the Second Volksraad, a commandant, and a field-cornet, the latter of whom was at Majuba. The newcomers explained to me the positions of Laing's Nek, Majuba, and Ingogo, which are in the heart of the mountains and impregnable to a large army.

With two engines we descended by a series of winds to Ingogo. At Newcastle, which has been abandoned by the English, the commissary promised me a tent and a mule-cart. The chief engineer took us into his saloon, coupled at the end of the train, so that I might see the landscape. One of the first things I saw was a herd of 2000 cattle captured from the English.

When the Dutch Company took over the railway it feared everything would be de-

## EN ROUTE FOR THE FRONT

stroyed ; but such has not been the case. Surprised, the English have had no time to do anything. Things are going on splendidly : there is a hospital at Volksrust ; the commissariat is at Newcastle. The Company feeds its employés with provisions sent from Pretoria.

The position of Dundee, where General Symons was killed, was pointed out to me. The fact that it could have been chosen is proof of incredible incapacity. Amongst the heights commanding the position from which the English tried to dislodge the Boers, defence must have been an easy matter.

In the saloon carriage was the English general's writing-table, found at Dundee.

After leaving Glencoe we entered a very rich valley, beflowered with mimosa. It is inhabited by the Kaffirs. Here and there we met ostriches, which are domesticated by the blacks.

The Natal coal-mines are in the hands of the Boers, so that work in them is stopped,

## WAR NOTES

and the English army is obliged to send to Europe for coal.

The destruction of railways by the Boers consists in unbolting and wrenching the rails from the sleepers by aid of twenty oxen.

I fear more and more being unable to do anything for the Boers. My fears have increased since I was told of the want of resolution and inactivity of the chief command of the divisions. Operations, it is said, are decided at councils of war, attended by all the officers, and submitted to the judgment of the soldiers, who carry them out if it so pleases them. At Ladysmith, for instance, the occupation of a position appearing necessary, it was decided to attack it. Some were ready to march ; but others, considering that the attack was too dangerous, would not follow.

I stopped at Elandslaagte with M. Léon, who was in a compartment of the ammunition train. He kindly undertook our organisation, promising to obtain for us



## EN ROUTE FOR THE FRONT

a mule-cart, mules, boys, provisions, a sack of flour, maize, condensed milk, tins of English preserved meats, oil and candles, hatchets, bill-hooks, etc. We took luncheon. Just as the train was going to start a Dutch lady-journalist would have me sit for my photograph.

In agreement with M. Léon, I arranged a plan of what I shall have to do in regard to General Joubert, who, although ill, is in command.

I spent an excellent evening with Messrs. Boucher, Hirsch and Sauvier, friends of M. Léon from Johannesburg, who have accompanied him for three weeks past. The last named—insufficiently clothed after the heavy rain yesterday—caught fever, and lay in a cot near the table at which we were dining on excellent boiled fowl, green peas, and *viz au lait*. This luxury—our last one, for at the front we shall have to keep to corned beef—did not lack novelty by the side of a train in a naked country. A tent was pitched

## WAR NOTES

for us, and on an excellent bed and in my greatcoat, I slept until daybreak.

*December 7.*—To wash and shave, the very height of luxury! I had been up a couple of hours when my tether broke, and my horse escaped, its halter in pieces, which showed me that Papenfus, indifferent to our animals, slept in his compartment. He was told about his conduct, politely—for one must recollect the Boers are free men, and that equality exists even in the ranks. I ordered him to groom the horses, and simply by the way in which he did his work I saw that he was not up to his duties. After seeing M. Léon's friends off by train to Johannesburg, I called upon the amiable railway engineer in his saloon. Six mules have arrived for us. We have engaged a Hindoo as cook; we have telegraphed to Pretoria about the preparation of our installation; and since we are fitted out like gentlemen, have asked for a driver,

## AT THE BOER CAMP

in such sort that Papenfus will be merely decorative.

The trolley left with our provisions, and we put our horses, all ready saddled, into the train, *en route* for Modderspruit.

General Burger was absent when we reached the camp. M. Léon and I visited the Long Tom which is in position there with a field-piece and a Maxim. Near each gun was a guard of artillerymen; but I noticed there were no outposts, and even no Boers near the guns to support them. The Boers rely on the position—a very strong one, it is true, but not inaccessible to determined troops.

I called attention to a possible point of assault: a hill adjoining Ladysmith armed with a naval gun.

The town to the north appears as a line of workshops and buildings resting against rising ground, which supports the British camp. In the distance and to the left is the hospital and the camp reserved for women and children.

## WAR NOTES

The extensive plain is intersected by the river, which is near the town, but does not hem it in too closely. It was evident that the space was large, and that the distribution of Boer tents which I saw was very insufficient.

My health is moderate ; a little fever, and my stomach refuses to do its work.

*December 8.*—We had an alarm at three o'clock in the morning. The English have destroyed the guns which I saw yesterday. Fifteen men crept up, whilst a battalion on foot supported them ; the artillerymen, taken completely by surprise, fled, and owing to the remoteness of any assistance, and the nature of the mountain, which is strewn with big boulders and has no paths, they had a good hour to complete their work. The guns will have to be re-cast.

Bodies of Boer troops galloped off on all sides ; but, without guidance and without orders, they took up their positions haphazard.

## AT THE BOER CAMP

Léon thought we had the whole of the English on our hands ; but I was not so uneasy, as the English have no object in running risks and exposing themselves to losses, since they know rescue must come from Colenso. The only thing I feared—not having heard their field-guns when the Boers approached Ladysmith in driving back the English—was that a body of their troops had slipped away with them to Colenso, where a movement might have been combined with General Sir Redvers Buller. I told General Burger this on his return to camp, laying stress on the necessity for an attack ; but I found him embarrassed with his authority, and having neither any idea of how to get out of the difficulty, nor that superior will assumed here by irregulars and regulars alike. Besides, I was quite ill.

*December 9.*—Instead of continuing the exploration of Ladysmith, I have had to enter the ambulance, which is established

## WAR NOTES

near the railway station. I was very well received and attended by German doctors. They gave me a room in a cottage, but there are no sheets on the bed. The colic was so violent that I could have rolled on the floor.

*December 10.*—The English have taken another gun. Really, the Boers are not keeping on their guard. I have become acquainted at the ambulance with Colonel von Braun, who is ill like myself. The care shown us on all sides is touching; new milk has been brought for me from Toeplitz.

*December 11 and 12.*—Still at the ambulance, and progress very slow.

*December 13.*—Notwithstanding fever and dysentery, I have been able to leave the ambulance to go to Colenso, where a battle is reported. I remained on horseback for five hours in the sun. Difficulties of in-

## AT COLENSO

stallation are very great. After consulting with Sauer, we decided to camp near the telegraph on the banks of the Tugela. I called on General Botha, but he was absent, although night was near. I am bearing up under the strain.

*December 14.*—I have reconnoitred the front. The position is a very strong one; the fortifications are formed of rocks and bags of earth; and military stations have been placed everywhere. The horses, which are saddled at night, were taken to the watering-place at dawn.

I have been unable to pass through our lines, no chief being willing to take the responsibility of giving me the necessary authorisation. The English artillery deployed behind a dip in the ground, and came upon us. Shells fell all around, but, though smart, the fire was harmless. Galopaud fainting for want of food, we returned. Sauer made us some beef-tea. We purchased

## WAR NOTES

milk from the Kaffirs. The situation is improving.

The day will be without result ; but there will be a battle to-morrow.

I saw General Botha—young, intelligent, and doing his utmost. He thoroughly understood the position. I pointed out to him on our left, across the Tugela, an eminence which it was most important we should retain, and he sent 800 Boers to occupy it. I told him that, in view of the smallness of his force and the imminence of an attack by the English, I did not suggest offensive action.

After discussing the situation with Sauer, and conversing with the German Major, Von Reittenstein, who arrived on the steamship *Kaenig* with Galopaud, we returned to camp. Both of us think there is much to study and to admire in the Boers. At night we had two doctors to dinner—one the proprietor of the *Volkstem*—and Galopaud scored a great success with his cooking. We passed a quiet night.



## BRITISH ATTACK

*December 15.*—Battle to-day.

Sauer returned to Pretoria with the trolley to fetch more provisions. Being under fire has no attractions for him.

Galopaud, the proprietor of the *Volkstem*, and I rushed off, and, after following the railway, established ourselves between Colenso and the eminence on the left (that across the Tugela), which ought to be the object of all the efforts of General Buller. He has made a mistake in not primarily and solely attacking this height, whence he could have taken our Colenso defences from behind.

The attack of our position, which extended, wedge-shaped, into the plain, was made without any art whatever. It was, indeed, what you would call taking the bull by the horns.

The British deployed several lines of skirmishers, without order and without the assistance of lines in the rear, issuing from a depression in the ground around the rail-

## WAR NOTES

way which encircles the village, and attacking both flanks. The manœuvre was upset by the impeccable fire of the Boer artillery and infantry. The enemy prepared for it by a copious but ineffective cannonade. The number of shells we saw fall before a splinter passed near Galopaud's ear and hat was incredible. The Boers simply sheltered behind the kopjes, and it was so much money thrown away. The attack was very brave and methodical, but it was made without the faintest idea of what war is.

At one time, two English batteries imprudently took up a position under fire of the Boer rifles. The horses and gunners were killed; the guns abandoned. Twice did the English artillerymen, with superb courage, return under the terrible fusilade and carry away the dead; but without rescuing the guns, which remained under the Boer fire. I noted the accurate marksmanship of the Boer artillery in the case of a regiment of English cavalry, and the fire of the Boer in-

## LOSS OF BRITISH GUNS

fantry during the British advance on the left, which was for ever checked.

I was preoccupied by a breach in our line to the left, when, a moment afterwards, the Boers debouched at a gallop, occupied the position, and held it magnificently.

In short, in the carrying out of orders the Boers must be left alone. They are admirable in defence, but they can with difficulty be got to take the offensive. True, face to face with adversaries of the strength of the English, defence alone may suffice.

We shall begin again to-morrow. The Boers have scored a brilliant success, and their moral condition has benefited by it. They took twelve guns or Maxims, and made 200 prisoners, including several officers, who filed past us. The British losses must have exceeded 300 men, whilst the Boers only had 5 killed and about 20 wounded. There was something very touching in the sympathetic silence of the

## WAR NOTES

Boers in the presence of their prisoners. Some held out their water-bottles for them to drink.

*December 16.*—I went to congratulate General Botha. He appeared charmed with my appreciation, and amiably said that he would rather have Buller as an adversary than myself. He asked me to come to see him often. He was in front of the English pieces captured with their caissons. The German officers wished to keep together, but they got scattered. I again found them at the General's; all in a tangle; annoying him and having no success. I had them to dinner yesterday. Colonel von Braun is all right; but a certain other officer is an intolerable sponger—so much so that we have decided to close our stores to him.

I have visited the Boers on their positions, congratulating and conversing with them. I am beginning to think I succeed in my object—at least general sympathy shows it.

## BOER RELIGIOUS CEREMONY

I have reconnoitred the heights situated on the other side of the Tugela, and which are the key of the position. Well defended, they can be made impregnable, and the passage which they offer for retreat would certainly be very difficult to discover. Returning to Botha's tent to give him this information, I found Burger, discoursing under a white sunshade, side by side with a Pastor sheltered under a black umbrella. After prayers had been said by the General, hymns were intoned by the Pastor. Two hundred very meditative Boers, some War Correspondents, and artillerymen, attended the ceremony, the religious effect of which was intense, although spoilt by the sunshade and umbrella, which gave the General and the Pastor the air of auctioneers at a sale.

General Sir Redvers Buller has asked for an armistice of forty-eight hours to bury his dead, and also because to-day is a Boer fête. These English have every consideration!

## WAR NOTES

On the battlefield has been found the order for attack given by the English divisionary general, Clery, and, whilst his plans have been thrown into confusion by events, it substantiates all the conjectures which I laid before General Botha. It is said the English lost 1300 men.

*December 17, Sunday.*—The Boers sang psalms. The English have evacuated Colenso, some going in the direction of Weenen; they will attempt to get round the position which they were unable to take by a front attack. We shall raise our camp and return to Ladysmith.

A warm day, partly occupied in visits to Kaffir kraals to buy fowls. I shall to-morrow make the reconnaissance, which I have already had to postpone, in preparation for the attack of Ladysmith; then I shall return to the ambulance.

The results of General Cronje's victory on the Modder River exceed all hopes:

## AT THE LADYSMITH LAAGERS

mention is made of no fewer than 2000 killed.

*December 18.*—I have visited the Ladysmith position. Setting out at four in the morning, I did not get back until eight o'clock at night, very fatigued, but with results. In all the laagers I received a touching reception, and made the acquaintance of Villiers and Malherbe, both so French at heart that I was moved. I had luncheon in their tent. The horrible flies absolutely prevent one eating and drinking before nightfall!

*December 19.*—A flag of truce has arrived at General Burger's. A terrible storm is raging and it is bitterly cold, but I succeeded in getting my things, which were left at the ambulance. We are going to Elandsplaagte to get a big lot of victuals—potatoes, onions, bread, brandy, and fodder; also dishes and plates, a table and a stool. Abundance re-

turns. We dined under a large tent, in the light of lanterns, on *pot-au-feu* and boiled potatoes.

*December 20.*—We set out for Colenso, where cannon was heard; but it was only a false alarm. We returned after touching Klip River.

I have been introduced to General Joubert, who, although still too ill to get on horseback, came to the camp. To-morrow we shall go to Colenso, where a decisive engagement is imminent.

My report completed and translated, I returned to see General Joubert, who is well-disposed towards the French. Every step, however, must be cautious and discreet, for Joubert, commander-in-chief, is a personage of the Republic, and is looked upon as a certain successor to President Kruger. Politics play a great part in all military decisions; leaders shirk responsibility, especially when they belong, like



## EN ROUTE FOR COLENZO

Generals Joubert and Burger, to the Executive Council.

Politics, religion, and affairs of interest are the customary topics of conversation with the Boers.

*December 21.*—We again set out for Colenso. I have dismissed Papenfus—the most insolent, useless fellow I have ever known. He got the coolies to attend to his wants and fan him, and left me to unsaddle and groom my horse.

At seven o'clock, after sending the generals three copies of my report on the Ladysmith attack, and laboriously loading the trolley, the mules set off, but the team was deplorable and the driver worthless. We had numerous stoppages until, descending to the Klip River, the mules mounted an embankment and overturned the cart. It was a cruel blow, for we had to unharness and unload. Our dumfounded Kaffirs tried in vain to raise the trolley, and at last, with

the aid of the Boers, we succeeded and set off again. Galopaud took the reins, we crossed the Klip, and, after seven hours' march, reached the Colenso telegraph station and camped on the Tugela. I met Dr. Eulenberg, who camped with us. Sauer was pleased to see the arrival of good food and cooking, whilst I was pleased to see the Tugela again, to be able to take a bath and wash my linen, for on that wretched road I had to punish my horse with the spur, and it bundled me about amongst the mimosa.

We had a conversation. I contended that the Boers have retained the military and free ideas of the old nobility; that they are soldiers by nature, and hostile to all restraint or tax; that they are equal amongst themselves, but aristocratic in the case of foreigners; and that they have retained the habits of feudal vassals—jealous of their rights, deferent towards authority, but thoroughly understanding their own particular situation.

## ON THE TUGELA

*December 22.*—Camping on the Tugela. An inactive day from a military point of view. I took advantage of it to have a long conversation with Dr. Eulenberg, who gave me some curious details on the subject of the division of sentiment and interest existing in families here. For example, Sauer is with the Boers at Pretoria, and he has an English wife. One of his brothers, a minister at the Cape, is the adversary of Cecil Rhodes; but another brother in Rhodesia is Rhodes's faithful follower. *A propos* of Rhodesia, Dr. Eulenberg told me that if the Transvaal is the victor it will take the lead in South Africa, because it has incarnated the claims and ideas of independence of the whole Boer and Dutch race.

When the field-cornets refused at Colenso to occupy a hill separated by the Tugela, they telegraphed their refusal to President Kruger, taking pride in their decision, which they imagined gave them superiority in the

eyes of their men. Kruger replied at length by a letter, in which, as usual, he invoked God. When the councils of war come to a decision they draw lots, those chosen gallantly executing orders. These conferences and discussions impede command, when, in the case of leaders like Botha, it has a tendency to become strengthened; but they favour the excessive caution, delays, and irresponsibility of politicians whom the chances of politics have placed at the head of the army. If the Boers had other adversaries than the British, the enemy might strangely take advantage of these delays.

*December 23.*—The day was only noteworthy for an insignificant cannonade, whilst we were hoping for something better. To-day, unfortunately, words have taken the place of deeds.

I have been given some facts about the snakes here. The most dangerous species is the mamba, of which there are two

## BOER GOVERNMENT EXPLAINED

varieties; the green mamba, which lives in trees at a height of ten to fifteen feet, strikes at the head, and causes immediate death; and the black mamba, which hides amongst stones. There are also the puff-adder, resembling the cobra, and winding amidst grass; and land and water boas.

I have also obtained information on the form of government in the Transvaal. There are two Volksraads, one administrative and the other political. The President, who is elected by universal suffrage, appoints the officials, and governs by means of an Executive Council of five members, including himself and the Secretary of State, who are *ex officio*. He takes the initiative in the case of bills, introduces them before the first Volksraad, and when he wishes to pass them, presents them a second time. There are no ministerial crises: they would be useless against an independent executive authority.

Three members of the Executive Council

are elected by vote: the President and the Commander-in-Chief for five years; the Secretary of State for four years. The other two are elected for three years by the first Volksraad. The Budget is voted by the Volksraad, to which it is presented by the Executive Council.

*December 24.*—Sunday: a rest-day. Saw two members of General Joubert's staff, who told me they were deciding on an attack on Ladysmith. I conclude from that that probably my report has made progress.

We have had two or three guests since yesterday, consequently our provisions are running out, so Galopaud is returning to Ladysmith to get more. He will bring back one of the geese belonging to a farmer who has been imprisoned by the English, and we shall eat it to-morrow to the health of the captive. I disregard camp rumours; but the Lorenzo Marquez newspapers give names of many English

## CHRISTMAS IN CAMP

officers killed or wounded; among the Scotch troops alone are 53. An English colonel of artillery taken prisoner at Colenso went mad on the way to Pretoria. There are now 2400 English prisoners. Yesterday evening, in reconnoitring alone the English positions, I was followed by one of their patrols, who tried to intercept me. I had but to return at a quick pace.

*December 25.*—Christmas on the Tugela. As may be imagined, calm reigns supreme. All the English are engrossed in Christmas cheer, and the Boers, who are fervent Huguenots, group themselves together to sing psalms. We also have the unquestionable right to turn towards our French Christmas, which, with its distinctive, more familiar and more joyful charm, smiles to us from our far-off land. I think of the snow-clad country, and the faithful walking to church with the joyful and triumphal ringing of the midnight bell in their ears;

## WAR NOTES

of the beribboned and bespangled Christmas trees, illuminated in the midst of admiring and eager circles of children, wondering what surprises Father Christmas has in store for them. The mystery penetrates the most sceptical, and there falls on the midnight frequenters of *cafés*—all unknown to them—a ray of this great fête of the dawn of humanity.

All these things, which come from so far, deliciously attenuated and jumbled together, rid of their too harsh humanity, and even dreamily caressing, constitute for our souls—prisoners of time and space—an assuaging return to the beings and things which formed and watched over them, touched and overcome; an echo of the lullaby of the fatherland. Our souls fly in rapture towards that land when, abandoned to the unknown, and isolated by the world, they unbend themselves from action and return to their natural reflections.

Everything is new to me here—the country,



## CHRISTMAS IN CAMP

the men, and the situation. But I have seen too much of the world, and lived too long, to find anything really surprising when placed side by side with my recollections. In India, in Algeria, even in our Provençal Midi, there are landscapes analogous to those here. These rocky heights, sparsely grown over with prickly mimosa, I can identify, after a little effort, with the Estrella Mountains in Portugal, with the scenery in South Oran, and on the banks of the Indus. Amidst them winds the Tugela, its beautiful flowing water intersected by falls over barriers of black rocks; its bed bristling with blocks between soft side-channels of sand. The river swarms with fish, especially eels. Turtle-doves chase one another on its banks; yellow birds with black breasts suspend their artistically-shaped nests on its reeds; springboks, doubtless, come to drink its waters when silvered by the beamy brightness of southern nights. But since it has divided two rival

camps fiercely engaged in the work of death, life has departed from this no longer free country. Men and horses have filled it with movement and commotion; tents have sprung up in every hollow; revetments of trenches have covered all the ridges; and echo brings the far-off menace of a cannonade, a symbol of the effort being prepared against this line of river—formerly beneficent, but now an obstacle of war, and probably the future tomb of numberless victims.

Our conical tent was pitched near the water in the garden of the building used as a telegraph office; our horses were fastened to peach trees; our trolley was placed alongside some white railings, over which its tarpauling rested. Three Hottentots—more senseless than the stones between which they slipped the sticks feeding the fire under our pot—looked in their black immobility like three basaltic blocks thrown on the ruddy dust of the river bank. Above, the

## CHRISTMAS IN CAMP

sun poured on our heads its immutable African heat, colouring the landscape with the radiance of red-hot brick, and casting a consuming glare on the foliage, which bent its head under such an overwhelming wealth of light.

As during a campaign, the days are both empty and full; haunted with expectations, and broken by the too-apparent exigencies, here without a veil, of material needs. When awakened by daybreak or by cannon, you throw off your covering, go groom your horse, and give it corn and water. Then you take a small bowl, which habit has transformed into a wash-hand basin, and wash yourself, quickly or slowly, as the case may be. A thin coffee, made with condensed milk, washes down some biscuits; and the tender may imagine they are having a cup of chocolate. You then set out on horseback for a reconnaissance, for a visit to the camps of the Boers, or for a conversation with the general, preparing your own meal

## WAR NOTES

when you return. A slice of fresh beef is stuck on a many-pronged fork—which makes an admirable grill—and whilst it is cooking you watch that the bread toasting on the end of a knife does not burn. If you can have such a treat as a few boiled potatoes, and add a little lime-juice to some clear water from the Tugela, or make some tea if you want hot beverages—you might be at Voisin's for luncheon!

From noon until three o'clock the sun is the great conqueror, and holds the mute and inoffensive camps under its powerful glare.

Then, bodies of horsemen wind up the mountain paths, slip along the river banks, and survey the railway; troops of horses come from the pasturage to drink in the river, the oxen of the waggons shake off their sleepy torpor, and the hills awaken with the gaiety of this animal life; and the banks are peopled with bathers. And thus it will be until nightfall, when you have another slice of broiled meat, and as a great

## CHRISTMAS IN CAMP

treat, a pot of red haricot beans, before rolling yourself, fully dressed, in your covering and finding easy sleep.

By religious reciprocity between the adversaries there was certainty of calm to-day. One would have thought the English more desirous of sending to their gracious Sovereign, as a Christmas card, the long deferred news that they had at last gained an advantage over us, and stretched a liberating hand towards Ladysmith. But they have not done so. The hill we occupy on the left bank of the Tugela, forming the key of our position on the other bank, is within their reach without them wishing to take the advantage.

Yesterday evening, after crossing the river and slipping through the mimosa, which leads in the direction of their lines, I found myself in sight of one of their patrols, who manœuvred to get round me. My reconnaissance was cut short; but if they

had let me advance further, as I intended, they could have cut off my retreat. These isolated reconnaissances are evidently to no purpose. Colonel von Braun, of the German mission, accompanied a Boer reconnaissance the other morning, and he was able to approach so near to the British camp that a captain, who was doubtless patrolling on his side, mistook Braun for one of his own nationality and galloped towards him. Braun retreated towards the escort of Boers, who, suddenly appearing before the thunder-struck Englishman, cried "Hands up!"; at the same time taking aim. He obeyed the command without waiting for it to be repeated, and was taken back to camp with a non-commissioned officer, who followed him. It appears no guard was accompanying them, and this, to say the least, is strange, as well as the fact that the officer should have made a spontaneous movement towards an unknown person without the slightest suspicion.

## CHRISTMAS IN CAMP

Nothing, however, is stranger than this war between men who keep their respective positions without dislodging each other. It is immobile warfare, the warfare of two hundred years ago; for everything is out-of-date in the ideas and in the methods of the Boers, and yet the incapacity of their adversaries makes them the masters of the situation.

The German officers invited us yesterday evening to drink champagne, Braun saying that, at this anniversary of the Christian era, Christian officers could not but unite fraternally. The conversation was very cordial, and I returned the invitation by asking them to dine with us this evening on Galopaud's goose. The bird was one of a flock of appetising whiteness, which aroused our covetousness every time we crossed the abandoned farm of a Natal Boer, prisoner with the English. The interest in a position so unfortunate, re-

## WAR NOTES

presented under the most glowing colours, but imperfectly contained the implacable exigencies of our head-cook—too careful of his reputation. The approach of Christmas made his idea more and more tenacious, and the fate of the birds more and more precarious. At last, the cares of revictualing having one day left him to himself, a revolver-bullet ended this too-strained situation, and this evening we ate our Christmas roast without questioning ourselves too closely as to whether the Boer farmer would have disposed of it otherwise.

How unlike our French Christmas this anniversary in the land of the Boers; fêted in company with German officers, whom military courtesy has made, under the circumstances, our comrades; fêted without chimes, or organ peals, or flowers, or candles; without any awakening of the years which have slipped by in the presence of the eternal youth of religious splendours. French blood, however, flows abundantly



## A FALSE ALARM

here. But between the Boers and ourselves there is the irreconcilable barrier of another religious cult, and between the comrades of the same military cult—drawn together through their isolation as foreigners—is the bitter recollection of a mutilated fatherland.

*December 26.*—We lunched yesterday with a field-cornet, who received us with warm assurances of sympathy.

The Germans dined with us in the evening, Galopaud surpassing himself. We apprehended a brush with the enemy. Sauer dreamed about it so much that from under his tent, at dead of night, came a flourish of cock-crows, ending with a sound like the clucking of a hen about to lay. The bad humour aroused by this astounding alarm vanished in peals of laughter.

At the sound of the first cannonade we jumped out of bed, groomed the horses, swallowed our coffee, and set off. The

## WAR NOTES

firing stopped; but we continued our reconnaissance, startling antelopes, crossing farms, which, as a rule, were abandoned; threading our way amongst trees, and trying to reach the English position by the extreme right. Sauer was not too easy over my plans; but a lucky accident reassured him, and proved I was right. We saw in front of us a strong reconnoitring party of Boers, whom we had rallied. General Botha has fifty scouts, whom he despatches on the flanks or heels of the English, and who go out every day. Three or four of them are venturesome, but the others have the characteristic Boer prudence.

Three miles and a half from the British camp we met a few rare patrols, some advance guards, and horses grazing; little life, no movement of cavalry. On ground so well adapted, a splendid attack could be made on these sluggards. But how make oneself heard here on the subject of offensive warfare!

## BAD WEATHER

We amused ourselves by capturing two horses under charge of a trooper. Galopaud and Sauer came to words; one always wanting to do what the other condemned. Galopaud treats Sauer as though he were a sutler, whilst Sauer has a tendency to treat Galopaud as a busybody.

We then crossed the Tugela by a splendid bridge of planks built by the Boers. Previously two young Boers, having a great desire to shake hands with a French officer, came running to be introduced to me.

The heat is overwhelming. My chocolate was a shapeless mass with my socks in my holster. I was reduced to sardines. But what matter! I am becoming acclimatised.

*December 27.*—I was unable to get a wink of sleep last night, as my tent was open—it was impossible to close it owing to its contraction—and it allowed the rain to bathe my feet. But the storm was superb! Uninterruptedly, on all sides, the

## WAR NOTES

lightning flashed, illuminating the night, rising like blinding Roman candles, and interlacing its dazzling zigzags. Rain then fell heavily, perpendicularly, penetratingly; and I had a vague impression the water was rising towards my poor belongings gathered around me. I spent the night saving them.

I called this morning on the General to impart to him my impressions on the situation. The desertion of British camps, the inertness of their tactics, and the facilities for marching presented by the country, convince me that we must act on the offensive and attack those camps which are unsuspecting for the very reason that they are persuaded the Boers will never come to them. These ideas may haunt the brain of a soldier, but they will never have any hold on the Boers, who wish for war with the least possible damage. They are, however, very punctual, in no matter what weather, at night duty. It is touching to see them, so thinly clothed, bowing their

## BAD WEATHER

backs under the heavy rain, or stoically going to the outposts between five and six o'clock in the evening to pass the night there. Some wear mackintoshes; the majority have only thin jackets. They pass along the railway in little groups, some on foot, others on horseback, and one can see from their dignified gravity that they are fulfilling a duty of conscience.

The great piece of news is the replacing of General Buller by Lord Roberts. Doubtless Buller will retain his army corps, and Roberts arrive with a second. The impossibility of taking advantage of Buller's inaction before the arrival of the new commander-in-chief worries and distresses me. But the Boers are not men you can influence; you must accept them as they are, good qualities and obstinacy combined.

*December 28.*—Galopaud is getting ready to go to Pretoria. I visited the General, but finding him absent, shall call again this

## WAR NOTES

evening. As I see there is nothing to do here, my idea is to go to Kimberley, where it is expected Buller will make an effort. Much to my regret, I shall have to go *via* Pretoria, and there will be no getting Sauer away from the place. Slowness and concern on the score of comfort are preponderant here; it is thought that the situation is not pressing. In short, the English have wasted December through Buller's inaction; January will be taken up in awaiting Lord Roberts, and February in changing plans; so that only in March, or in April, can the *dénouement* take place.

*December 29.*—Ill. Galopaud has left for Pretoria. Torrential rain is falling; my tent has been thrown to the ground. Visiting a laager yesterday, I was struck by the unconcern with which the Boers regard the change of command in the British army. They are convinced they will defeat Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener as though they

## BOER COMMISSARIAT

were common corporals. Their presumptuousness gives way now only before God.

*December 30.*—Our camp being inundated, we have changed it. On the subject of Roberts's arrival the Boers are saying: "When Buller came all hopes were centred in him; but we have seen what he was worth, and we think it will be the same with Roberts."

The commissary has given us bottles of jam and new bread. His department works with remarkable simplicity—without confusion, difficulty, or formality; everything is done *en famille*, very liberally, and everybody is served and satisfied. Cost is evidently a secondary consideration, but nevertheless considerable economy is made owing to the suppression of middlemen. Two officials make all the purchases. Possibly they take a commission, but it is limited to them, and their accounts are submitted to the State Auditor, who inspects them and

## WAR NOTES

rejects those the charges of which appear to him to be too great. And the English think we shall become exhausted because of the prolonged bad management of our Commissariat!

*December 31.*—The last day of a sad year! The Boers still rely on aid from France, because they are living on their illusions of two hundred years ago. But we have got beyond that. What has been happening there for more than two months past? Here, facing the Drakenberg, which raises its blue wall between Natal and the Free State, the slopes of which harbour the leopard, and that no pass, with the exception of the Reenen, penetrates, I feel in quite a new world. What a difference as regards living! To look after yourself in regard to the smallest details constitutes a very novel existence for those who are not accustomed to it. Thoughts are directed to a multitude of petty minutiae, and are dead



## CAMP MINUTIÆ

to everything else ; you lose time in doing work from which you are exempted in civilised life, work which constitutes the livelihood of many beings. There is no doubt that to be one's own tailor, saddler, wheelwright, cook, packer, mule-driver, washerman, butcher, water-carrier, and chimney-sweep is assimilating the livelihood of an enormous number of honourable men. Our knowledge is very rudimentary, but every one's willingness leads to a way being opened in these new fields. Galopaud is by far the most experienced ; Sauer sets to slowly and contradictorily. Recognising their superiority, and seeing to what a degree their ideas clash on a question of installation, or the preparation of a *pot-au-feu*, I let them do as they like. My opinion would only be a fresh cause of discord. Moreover, my duties partly exempt me from manual occupations.

The worst part is having to live in the midst of grease, raw or cooked meat, opened tins of preserved meat, spilt broth, and an

## WAR NOTES

invasion of flies and ants. There is an excess and dearth of everything—an excess of excellent meat, sufficient for six families; excess of smells and moral infirmity in the negroes; excess of provisions which are spoiling; dearth of vegetables, fruit, milk, eggs, sugar, and new bread. There is also an excess of water in our tents, ever subject to disagreeable invasions of storms of wind and water.

We hear a driver and a Cape boy (a Kaffir servant) have been sent. If they arrive tomorrow for New Year's Day we shall be able to think of moving. I shall ask General Joubert for authorisation to join the army of the Modder River, where something is going to happen, and the scene of which I shall study.

I have gathered some information on the Kaffirs. What is known as the *lobola*, or price paid to the family of a Kaffir wife, is a guarantee that she will, on the one hand,

## KAFFIR CUSTOMS

be well treated, and, on the other, will remain with her husband. It consists generally of ten pairs of oxen. Kaffir legislation, which rests entirely on tradition, is intricate. The law is dispensed either by special magistrates—Europeans selected for their knowledge of the customs—or by a native council of elders. The kings are buried on the high mountains, and mysteriously enshrouded. The Kaffirs consult great personages on their ills. They have no idea of a future life, but are given to superstitions and believe in magic. They consult the witch-doctor to know by whom a person has been killed, for they do not admit that death can be natural. Covered with horns and amulets, the witch-doctor gravely exercises his calling, and demands a very high fee. When summoned to a man of distinction, they cunningly fix on a person displeasing to him as the bewitcher.

*January 1, 1900.*—A young girl came this

## WAR NOTES

morning to wish me a Happy New Year—a rare occurrence at the camp, where women are excluded. She was the daughter of a Dutchman who has made money in the country by keeping a hotel, and who speaks good French. Hearing at the laager, where he is camped, of a French colonel, he came out of curiosity. Seeing them approach, I said to Sauer: "If that girl liked she could render me an invaluable service by neatly sewing a big hole made by the fire in one of the legs of my only pair of breeches." "Impossible!" he replied. However, after half-an-hour's conversation with the father, he himself suggested, without my appearing to notice the hole, that his daughter should make the repair. What use is Sauer's diplomacy!

I waited four hours for a reconnoitring party of eighty men. When it came it was reduced to fifteen, and I allowed it to pass without having the slightest idea it was the party I was to join. I then called on

## INTERVIEW WITH BOTHA

General Botha, who is ever charming and amiable. I expressed a fear that the English had left a mask before Colenso and taken part of their troops to the Cape, in order to convey them towards Kimberley, where their action would much more efficaciously prepare the attack Lord Roberts would make on the Orange Free State, not repeating a second time the grave error which dispersed Buller's efforts towards his flanks when his line of operations should have been in the centre, as much on account of the disposition of the enemy's troops as that of the country and the railways, as much for a political as for a strategical reason.

Botha replied that the English had moved a camp to his right, where the heights are lower, and that they were even making a branch railway to revictual it; and that he intended to reconnoitre it, probably this very night. He added that, knowing how tenacious the English are, he was persuaded they were determined to relieve Ladysmith.

## WAR NOTES

With the slowness of these English soldiers, who do not begin operations until all is in order, everything is possible.

I exchanged New Year wishes with the general, and then went to greet those most amiable field-cornets. On all sides affectionate salutations and wishes were being exchanged: it would be impossible to find more affectionate cordiality. The weather was fine; mimosa was in flower and scented the air; the sky, which this morning was cloudy and stormy, had been cleared by a spring breeze. People had given themselves over entirely to fêting the renewal of the year. Half-way down the slope under the tree which shelters our tent, I could take in the panorama of our positions between which wound the Tugela. I could see Colenso behind the top of a great height to the left, black above a range of lighter mountains. The details appeared with admirable distinctness in the marvellously clear air. Certainly in Paris we have neither the

## RECONNOITRING

same distant views, nor the same clearness, nor the same calm, nor, above all, that correspondence of one's own calmness of mind to ambient things.

For three days the flooded Klip has prevented revictualling. We have been living on loans, but have not suffered. Our hens are so tame that we have not had heart to kill them ; they are always around us.

*January 2.*—This morning I reconnoitred the outposts of the position on the right, and found that I was correct in thinking nothing was there or could come from that point. It would be stupid of the English to enter that flat passage, which would be flanked by our Colenso men, and end in a front attack against our positions south of Ladysmith.

Save the tents of a battalion facing me, and which could not conceal a large body of men, the English, as I told the General yesterday, were no longer there, and we

## WAR NOTES

shall hear tell of them on the Modder River. Well, then, try to reach there! But how get Sauer or the mule-cart there, obtain permits from the authorities, and find guides? One is driven to despair when living in the land of the Boers; and if I go, it will be to arrive too late.

This reconnaissance showed me a semi-circular position, held by twenty Boer camps, with two hills running out to the right, and forming a pendant to the mountain on the extreme left, though in this instance beyond the Tugela. On the right was an opening, flat or almost so, which we shall not be able to use as long as we are here. To hold the position really would need 50,000 men, and we have only 4000! How can one imagine 20,000 English soldiers, however incapable, not finding a means of making a hole in this curtain? I admired a pretty movement of horses and oxen in the hollows, valleys, and green circuses of the mountains.

The English cannonade at Ladysmith



## LOST IN THE WILDS

has at last killed a Boer! Who will reckon what he has cost the United Kingdom?

These stony, sparsely-grassed landscapes, covered with the mimosa's parasols, are rather rugged than attractive, although at the present time beflowered; but they are redeemed by the marvellous sky and a clearness of atmosphere which is unique. Excursions are fatiguing, and falls not over deadened.

*January 3.*—With the usual slowness, we did not set out for Ladysmith yesterday until half-past five, and by seven o'clock, when crossing the Klip, night was upon us. It was dark when we entered the mimosa through which we had to pass before reaching the farm of the imprisoned Boer farmer. Sauer led the way. He claims he can see better at night than in the day time; but nevertheless he went wrong. Without knowing it, we branched off from our road, and after finding ourselves again in the thin

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mimosa wood, asked ourselves how it was we had seen neither farm nor river. We had evidently made a mistake; but where were we? Were we going towards Lady-smith? On the left was a glimmering from some tents, and a search-light illuminated the night—two facts which hardly showed it was a Boer laager. And then the route was very broad.

Sauer sharing my perplexity, we turned back, meeting a Boer who told us we were *en route* for Elandslaagte. Sauer at once struck across the kopjes to gain the road to the Hoofdlaager, the horses colliding with rocks and stumbling into holes. I knew quite well we were blundering, but Sauer, as usual, would have his own way. In this unknown country of furrows, rocky steppes, and many other impediments which you find out from their neck-breaking capacity, you sink up to your neck. But at last we reached a stream where the frogs were deafening. Sauer then disappeared in the

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night. I was perplexed to know what to do, and had finally decided to act on my own initiative when he found me again.

He was bewildered and less tenacious. I told him that to try to reach the Hoofdlaager would be breaking our horses' and our own legs without any chance of success, that it was eleven o'clock, that we must make up our minds to sleep in the open; but that at all costs we must get out of the swamps. So we set to work, wofully turning in a circle, pursued by the morass and the irregularities of the ground, and thrown back from ground, in which we sank, towards muddy ditches, into which we fell. From time to time Sauer, who led, since he can only see at night (and it was as black as pitch), disappeared in a hole, whence came a weakly "Oh, dear!"; for the worse matters got the more celestial became the modulation of his voice.

At the third tumble, in spite of physical suffering caused by repeated sprawling, I

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raised my eyes heavenwards, instinctively looking for the angel who warbled with such suavity. This diversion led to a harder knock. Fortunately, we had reached stones—for the first time soft to my feet,—and the croaking of the frogs died away a little. More and more we collided against the blocks on the kopje, the limestone becoming more enfeebling to me. At last—feet weary with fatigue, and wrists sprained by supporting our horses—we reached a small grassy space unencumbered with rocks. That we should stretch ourselves out was decided; but we needed a tree to which to attach our horses, so I went to inspect an indistinct object looking like a bush at the summit of a kopje. The ascent, although rocky, was fairly easy; but when I got to the top I found that what I had taken to be a bush was a useless pyramid of stones. Descending was a very different matter. Without guidance, I lost myself. I called out. No reply! Then a far-off shout from

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Sauer reached me. I set off, as I thought towards him, but found I was mistaken. More wandering amongst the rocks! Up on the heights once more, his voice was more distinct, guided me, and at last we met. We trammelled the horses with the bridles, and fastened them together with their halter. My saddle for a pillow, and the saddle-cloth thrown over me, I tried to sleep under the splendour of the heavens. I am accustomed to a little less luxury as regards height of floor, and also to fewer lumps under my back! The dew drenched me excessively, and before dawn I walked about to try to find where we were. We had slept between the Hoofd-laager and the Boer farm, which, instead of crossing, we had wound round. It appears the search-light we saw was a new acquisition of the Boers; we had never approached an English camp at all!

We were excellently received at the haven of Kantoor by the leader, Baff, who

## WAR NOTES

keeps an admirable table. Our drivers went off to Colenso. We shall await Generals Joubert and Lucas Meyer.

Ewald Esselen! One loves to note on one's path the exceptional beings whom Nature has made eminently sympathetic. Ewald Esselen is one of them: a tall man, with a fine, intelligent head, and fascinating eyes, a pleasant smile, and a distinguished face framed in an auburn beard; a dreamer whose gaze passes beyond realities, and penetrates the future. A mere student, he prophesied a great destiny for his country, and desired it with his whole heart. He was preparing for his medical examinations when he heard his country was at war, so he left everything, and came to the front. Later, he was persuaded to enter political life. He became Attorney-General; but gave up the post, considering he was not allowed sufficient liberty to carry out his duties in accordance with the sole light of

## EWALD ESSELEN

his conscience. Assuring the Government of his respect for its orders, he bowed before their necessity; but refused to give up his freedom of thought under any consideration. A remarkable advocate, he earned from £6000 to £7000 a year, which he spent on all with the generosity of a lord who stops at nothing. Ever ready to do a kindness, to make a present, or pay an attention; as good to others as to his own family, Esselen has a disposition which is exceptional as much on account of his goodness as his breeding. It is necessary God should sometimes show us men such as we ought to be! Ewald Esselen, seeing I was ill, came immediately with soda-water, and all those little dainties which are priceless in camp. He felt I was a foreigner, and so showed me a cordiality such as at once makes us forget absence from home, dissimilarities, and obstacles.

## WAR NOTES

Jacob Van Wyck! A member of the First Volksraad. A tall, strong man, with an energetic face and keen eyes; the type of man who lavishes his good services on others. He is stationed at Modderspruit (headquarters for rations), and thence travels between the Krugersdorp laager, which contains his electors, and his farm, the produce of which he brings them. He has mobilised his waggons, which go backwards and forwards between Ladysmith and Colenso. He has just sent off two hundred fowls, and is already thinking of another consignment. Moreover, he completely forgets himself; for when we visited him in his tent we found he had no coffee. At Colenso he gave us what came to his hand. Naturally, he is extremely popular. One would like to see our deputies inspired by such popularity. I really think I could sooner get a poultry-yard from Mr. Van Wyck than a single fowl from any deputy during the whole of my existence.



## KURUMAN TAKEN

*January 4.*—News came of the taking of Kuruman, capital of Becuanaland, with its garrison of 120 English, and of a big razzia.

I have seen General Joubert, and he was ready to give me at once the authorisation to go to Kimberley; but as I insisted on acting only in accordance with his advice, he said he would give it to me on Monday. The position of affairs which I unfolded is so evident that all the Boers see it. Joubert has ordered the Boers at Kuruman to rejoin Cronje. He wants to finish with Ladysmith, but I must see the actual attack before believing it will be made.

Three Frenchmen, who arrived on the *Gironde*, have been introduced to me. Come here to fight, they were full of enthusiasm; but are now bitterly disappointed at being left to themselves. They will be handed over to the German-Dutch legion, which already contains several Frenchmen, and can be given some small employment.

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The general was surrounded by his family. Near him was his wife—a stern lady, thin and spectacled, who the day before I found protecting her milk from the flies in the midst of a swarm of little Kaffirs. Joubert was dressed in a frock-coat and black trousers—the hall-mark here of a state official.

He is a politician—amiable, disinterested, and sceptical—whom people regard as the eventual successor to Kruger; but in no way a soldier. His enemies make out that he admires everything English, and he has certainly handed over Mr. Paff's telegraph department to two young Englishmen, who, however amiable they may be, are nevertheless Englishmen possessing the secret of the ciphered correspondence.

Moreover, secrets float about and are whispered in the ear. Mr. Esselen, however, contends that the information bureau exists without papers or registers, carefully guarded in the well-stored heads of the principal leaders. I should like to think so;

## EN ROUTE FOR COLENZO

but until more amply advised I shall believe that the Boers are only informed haphazard, and have no regular and precise information bureau. Otherwise, how could they remain for weeks uncertain of the English movements only four miles from camp? It may be that in the case of generals like Botha and Cronje, who are born leaders, things are done, as far as they are concerned, on a more military basis. But the chief command is trusted to the chance of circumstances and the currents of opinion.

*January 5.*—We travelled yesterday, in fine but cloudy weather, from Ladysmith to Colenso. At the moment of departure I was joined by two Frenchmen from Johannesburg. Only one of them, M. Dupont, who has a horse, accepted my invitation for Colenso; but he will not overtake us till we reach the Klip, as he is invited to luncheon somewhere.

When about to leave, the three French

## WAR NOTES

volunteers, whom I saw yesterday, brought me a handsome present of tinned foods, asking me to accept them as they had no means of carrying them. Greatly moved by their kindness, I thanked them heartily; but begged them not to rob themselves, and promised they should be provided with means of transport.

Headquarters' staff is composed of relatives of General Joubert, Mr. Malan, his son-in-law, carrying out the duties of chief of the staff, whilst Mrs. Joubert may be compared to quartermaster-general. They are all very friendly and easy of access, with the exception of Mrs. Joubert, who, although she may be very good at bottom, knows how to make you appreciate her goodness the more because of her customary sternness. As a whole, headquarters, with its animals, negresses, and large tents, is more fair-like than military.

After lunching in Mr. Esselen's tent—he having gone to Pretoria—and paid farewell

## EN ROUTE FOR COLENZO

visits, we listened to the grievances of Paff, who was to have accompanied us, but has to remain on duty. At last we got astride our horses, and, as far as the Klip, travelled at a fair speed. There, however, the team had to be unyoked, as the river was too high for any one to cross.

We had eaten some biscuits and biltong, put the horses to grass, and were wearily waiting in company with General Botha's secretary, who carried in his buggy a leg of mutton, a present from Ladysmith, when Sauer, who had been wandering here and there, brought us an invitation to lunch with the Germans who were making the bridge over the river. Capital fellows we found them. Had boiled mutton, onion sauce, and black coffee, which made us men again. I found that our host had gone through the war of 1870, and been wounded.

At last, M. Dupont arrived, accompanied by three Italians who had been placed under his charge. They all lunched with the

## WAR NOTES

German, until it was learnt the Klip was going down. Some of the horses drifted with the current as though drowning. We had arranged communication with the opposite bank by means of a small raft upon which we embarked stark naked, counterbalancing our weight with accoutrements and personal effects. I ran and caught the horses. Then we started on our voyage, preceded by the secretary's buggy, which was drawn and piloted by Zulus. Unfortunately the frail equipage capsized and was dislocated, the secretary and the seat-box separating from us, and it was only by the greatest chance that the Kaffirs succeeded in securing the whole together in the middle of the current. Our horses soon were swimming, and we were up to our waists. My horse, however, was a clever animal, and I did not drift much. In spite of vigorous trotting, I was wet until bed-time.

Sauer, who stuck to his idea of crossing

## AT COLENZO

on the raft, which we ended by abandoning, at last caught us up. Rain fell. We arrived in time to cook our leg of mutton and offer Dupont an excellent dinner. Between times, a number of decent Kaffirs arrived for us, and we had no longer to work like niggers. We also received utensils which had been lost on the railway, bottles, vegetables, fruit, and even eggs. So, this morning, we were able to lunch on an omelette, our mutton—warmed up,—some jam, and tea. A regular feast!

I have just returned from a visit to General Botha. He received me with his customary friendliness, listened to all the information I was able to give him, and would like to travel with me to Pretoria, after handing over his command to Lucas Meyer. If he goes to the Modder River, or to the Cape, as I hope he will, I shall be glad to throw in my fortune with his. He will probably be here soon on the subject of a certain event which I foresee will take

## WAR NOTES

place this evening or to-morrow, and which certainly is connected with Ladysmith.

*January 6.*—General Botha's secretary came to inform me yesterday evening that the general would call for me as he was passing at two in the morning. Had a heavy dinner of stuffed cucumbers. Preparations for departure still heavier. Palavered with the ever-maniacal Sauer. Insomnia! At one o'clock, coffee, oats for the horses, and, finally, start under risk of the darkness.

There is nothing mathematical in the formation in column of the Boers; but grouping by commando is managed very well nevertheless. These men see at night as clearly as in the day-time, and gallop along the roads to rejoin their group. My whole attention was directed to keeping up with them. Then we entered the open country, stumbling against the stones and sinking into muddy places, the horses per-



## CAMPAIGNING WITH BOTHA

forming miracles of equilibrium—crossing, slipping, threading around rocks, winding round kopjes, and disappearing in the dongas. This ride under the stars over unknown ground, strewn with obstacles, and at times at a very rapid pace, constituted a danger otherwise more serious than the fire to which I had been exposed the whole day. The column was made to halt by the general behind an eminence commanding the plain of Ladysmith, on a level with the hospital. The horses kept in hand in groups and the riders on the alert, a reconnaissance was decided upon. We were in reserve and with orders to remain so, which was perhaps unfortunate; for at one time, between eight and nine o'clock, it appears we had the advantage, and the weight of this reserve force might have decided the matter. We hesitated, but at last the men's ardour got the better of them, and a large number went off. I followed the Boksburg field-cornet, who descended at full gallop

## WAR NOTES

amongst the boulders hidden by high vegetation.

Halted in a ravine, dismounted, mustered the men; resumed the march through the mimosa, then again halted, and left the horses at the edge of a mimosa wood. Rapidly crossed open ground on foot, slipped through the bushes, and once more halted behind some kopjes. Successive engagement of men around a wooded mountain, the summit of which was captured by the Boers, whilst the Natal Volunteers disputed the last wooded slopes. Firing was violent at times, but at others methodical, as when at the butts.

We were landed in a ravine near a tributary of the Klip. Whilst the bullets whistled over my head I dozed on the muddy ground. The Boers, one after the other, sought shelter under the perpendicular bank of the river, regarding the crossing of 150 yards of rushes and un-

## CAMPAIGNING WITH BOTHA

protected open as a fine game. Water was up to their knees. Then it was like rabbit shooting.

Once near the water, the Boers were in a cool place, and forgot the fight. Some stripped and bathed; others washed their linen; but the majority remained in the shade, with their backs to the enemy. The English at last succeeded in reaching them from behind, and riddled them with bullets. The Boers fired back, after which, in the oddest of dress, they dispersed like a flock of sparrows, and took up a position at two extremities on the river bank.

That dragged me from my nap. Waiting until the English, who were quite near me, had been duly shot and forced to regain their position, I glided under the mimosa, and ended by finding there a Boer with whom I had conversed a short time before; so at full speed we crossed the river in order to rejoin the Boers and the field-cornet. At that moment I saw a spectacled

## WAR NOTES

German doctor, who was carrying a corpse on his white horse, abandon his mournful load for a wounded man, both of whose eyes had been destroyed by a strange and terrible wound.

The fight dragged on; the cannonade slackened. As to the plan of attack I was ignorant, so cannot say if it were in conformity or not with my own. The movement (a night one) took the English by surprise, as we learnt by the rapid firing of a Maxim, which gave the alarm at three in the morning. The enemy's positions were approached in such a manner as to keep them under the fire of the infantry, as was proved by a hot and prolonged fusilade.

Boer ways are most singular. They will remain seated or lying down under shelter, turning their backs to the enemy, and not even troubling about a sentry; then, without your being able to make out what has troubled their *far niente*, they will turn

## CAMPAIGNING WITH BOTHA

round and commence a violent fire, which soon they themselves will stop. As at this particular engagement they were fighting Natal volunteers, they greeted them without any bitterness with such phrases as "Come! brothers, you are disturbing us! Your attentive patrol has once more intruded! Take this, brothers!" And they would salute them with a shower of bullets. It seemed to me that they wasted their ammunition when tired of an engagement which, as the one in point, became unimportant. At one time the field-cornet ordered them to fire, and they obeyed with uncheckable vigour. I judged from the number of shots returned us how exaggerated was our fire, and, from the impossibility of seeing the enemy, how fictitious.

A storm then gathered, broke, and drenched us. I found shelter under a fissure on the other side of the river with a friend of the field-cornet, a charming man who I found spoke English. We conversed on sport, he

## WAR NOTES

belonging to the region neighbouring Ipopa, which is the land of big-game hunting. Thanks to him I did not feel dull, and in my hole I only got wet to the knees. Then I recollected that my cape was on my horse a mile away, and crossed almost with dry feet to return to the field-cornet and tell him. As in clinging to the bank I had dirtied my hands with mud, I calmly washed them under the considerably slackened fire of the English, an act which the Boers considered most imprudent. I was being reproached, when suddenly the river became swollen by a water-spout, which flowed with a furious current, and we found ourselves cut off. Nothing easier than to be caught between that torrent and the hill occupied by the enemy. I considered the situation dangerous, and stormed against the Boers, who continued to exhaust their ammunition, in order to frighten the enemy, when they might be so much in need of it if the situation became critical. I was benumbed

## CAMPAIGNING WITH BOTHA

with cold. A piece of biltong was given me, and swallowed without biscuit.

Night came. At last the torrent went down; the current slackened. Orders had been given to leave or to remain, just as was liked—nothing definite, as usual. The only thing to do was to set off. The height had been won by the Free State, and would be definitely occupied at day-break on the morrow. I looked at those poor Boers, drenched to the skin, and their trousers soiled with mud, yet every one cheerful; not a complaint or a bad-tempered word came from them. One took me on his shoulders and carried me over—a service for which I was very grateful, for I was so wet and cold that I was taking harm. All were wading up to the stomach. But at last we reached our horses. It was a pleasure to put on my cape and drink a mouthful of brandy. We returned with the Boksburg men to Colenso in such pitch darkness that I tried to keep behind a white horse in

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order not to get lost. *En route* I found Dupont and Sauer, stranded and bewildered; and talked with several Boers of French origin. They are all very proud of that, and it obtained for me their affectionate sympathy. At last, at eleven o'clock, we arrived.

*January 7.*—I slept until nine o'clock, quite easy about Colenso, as the English had gone. General Lucas Meyer has arrived. There is nothing but one long protest against want of orders yesterday. "Joubert wouldn't take any responsibility!" "Joubert listens to nothing!" The general also wishes to go towards the Cape. Everyone wants to leave the Natal army. A field-cornet, who came to lunch with us, said he was wounded to the heart by an operation so deplorably carried out.

He was a professional hunter; had killed every kind of big-game with the exception of the rhinoceros. His father being a hunter,



## A CHAT WITH A HUNTER

he was trained from childhood. He offered to accompany me for nothing for three months, and during that period to capture young couples of all animals of the antelope type up to the eland, to take back to France. The eland trots, and the giraffe gallops, and have to be followed through the bushes at the top of a horse's speed, and fired at when on the wing. The giraffe is followed quite closely in order to profit by the opening of the branches which it thrusts aside with its powerful neck. Its head appears above the bushes and serves as a guide. The best biltong is made with its flesh; eaten fresh it is exquisite, specially that of the female—really the most savoury meat one can find—when taken from under two inches of fat. The skin is excellent for making thongs and the uppers of boots.

Hunting is very arduous work in these wild regions, often without water. A waggon and asses—the only animals unaffected by the bite of the tsetse—are taken when on

## WAR NOTES

an expedition. The water—especially rain water—immediately envenoms the bite of this fly; the animals bitten swell rapidly, principally at the neck, which fills with a yellow humour, and die at once. The fly lives where game is found, in such sort that it is met with on one side of a mountain and not on the other. My hunting friend had lost all kinds of animals through it. Instead of oxen, he took in preference cows, followed by their calves, so as to have milk; but all died. Food was supplied by victims of the chase. The remedy against the bite of the tsetse is carbonic acid and new milk; but how difficult to get these in the wilds!

Sport is to be obtained on the confines of the Transvaal, British, and Portuguese territory, so that frequently the permission of the three governments is necessary. At the least, large sums for licences have to be paid.

Holes in the ground are numerous,

## A CHAT WITH A HUNTER

but one does not hear tell of accidents, in spite of terrible paths covered at the highest speed. The horses are first class. Ridden at the top of their speed amongst rocks, over dongas, and through thickets, they keep their feet with marvellous sureness. If the rider show the least prudence he cannot advance, and his quarry escapes. When he has gained on it, and considers it within range, he presses the neck of his steed, which stops dead by throwing itself on its haunches. He then jumps off and fires. Even in following animals on horseback, my friend estimated that he killed four out of every five shot at.

If we add to this skill in riding and shooting the Boers' extraordinary keenness of sight, we shall understand to what an extent these men differ from us. Their recollection of places, and the ease with which they find their way, is astounding; and when lost at night-time in the depths of the bush they will, as a last resource, leave

## WAR NOTES

their horses to take them back to their laager. That was what I did yesterday when unable to see my way, although it had been covered twenty times before.

We shall leave to-morrow at dawn for the Hoofdlaager, so as to obtain an authorisation to go to the Modder River.

I shall be glad to leave General Joubert, who is essentially a politician, knows nothing about war, and may continue to vegetate around Ladysmith. But I shall regret the Tugela and General Botha, if, as I believe, we shall not meet again. Lucas Meyer talks about handing over the command to him, so that he can leave for the Free State.

*January 8.*—We were to leave at four o'clock, but it will be seven, perhaps later, when we are ready! I watched the Kaffirs at work, and came to the conclusion that more slothful brutes never usurped their place in humanity. They are incapable of

## KAFFIRS CRITICISED

an idea, and, with still more reason, of putting two ideas together. If they do anything right it is by accident; it is because their fingers did the right thing mechanically, as they might have done the very opposite. It is contended that certain of them, specially trained, get to do well a limited number of things, that being a question of habit, as in the case of the horse; but initiative in the simplest act, or merely the carrying out of an order which is not executed immediately, is entirely beyond them. It is impossible, for instance, to get a Kaffir to wake you in the morning, unless the hour for rising happens to coincide with a personal occupation which impels him to disturb your slumbers! I know the Kaffirs to possess but one capacity, that of eating phenomenal quantities of meat. Our food supplies (vegetables and fruit) please them; but to such an extent does their mental dulness exclude all foresight, they are incapable

## WAR NOTES

of providing themselves with food without stealing.

Crossing the Klip was naturally the occasion for delays on the part of good old Sauer, it being his nature to scrutinise the inconveniences of a decision before coming to it, which generally permits him to shirk it. However, seeing Dupont and I make off, tired of waiting and seized with a fine impulse, he dashed forward at the head of his five blacks, who had been kicking about naked in supreme expectation for two hours. Our waggon mounted the opposite bank without other accident than the breaking of its pole. When Sauer, proud of his fearlessness, came up with us, he found we were still under the influence of his slowness, so much so that, probably confused at the bottom of our cowardly and egotistical natures when he had thus been so brave, we did not do him the justice due to great deeds.

On arriving, I visited General Joubert.

## CONSULTATION WITH JOUBERT

He spoke to me quite naturally about my report on the attack of Ladysmith, although before the affair he had not breathed a word on the subject. I clearly recognised from that his wish to shirk responsibility; but I contented myself by observing that a report, however precise, was not an order to the troops to move, and that to transform it, it needed definite indications as to time and duties. There is no doubt that if the detachment of the Pretoria camp had marched at night, instead of in the day-time, it would have had a different effect, and would not have suffered the losses it did. Joubert blames General Botha with having come without orders; which I cannot believe, considering the negative *rôle* the former has adopted. Finally, he asked me forthwith for another report, and made an appointment with me for the next day at the Free State camp to meet the commandos. I requested him, if my report was to be transformed into

an order, to allow me in any case to make the reconnaissance with the leaders of the column, and to leave them with the responsibility of the men under their orders, and freedom in the arrangement of their reserve. It is inadmissible, in fact, that, in the case of so extensive a country, the Commander-in-Chief should order reinforcements, because he cannot form a correct idea of the action, and these reinforcements cannot even arrive in time. This explains the heaviness of our losses — 54 killed and 103 wounded; certain columns having urged the affair on, whilst others abstained, and, consequently, even prevented the former from retaining the advantages they had gained. It is certain that in this badly managed affair the Boers captured a masterly position, but which was evacuated for want of orders and because it was rainy weather.

However that may be, I am remaining, and to-morrow I shall make a tour at



## PREPARING TO LEAVE

Harrismith laager (five hours' journey) with Léon. That point studied (and it is the nearest to the English position), I shall draw up an order to move, the very precision of which will save my responsibility. But shall we start again? I doubt it, this work serving chiefly to mask a retreat.

Sauer leaves us to-morrow morning. He has been dying to taste the pleasures of family life, and I could not advise him to do otherwise inasmuch as he will take our waggon to be repaired. Dupont also leaves. I shall be ready on Wednesday to do the same with Léon, in whose company I shall travel to the Modder River, and then towards the Cape.

I have seen Captain Ricchiardi, who is trying to organise an Italian legion, and wished him success. The three young French volunteers are to be handed over to him; but I shall be very astonished if the legion is in fighting order before the end of the war.

*January 9.*—A rainy day at the Hoofdlaager spent in my tent, which lets in the wet. Oh! the weariness of being able to do nothing under the tormenting lashing of the downpour! Always ill-luck at the Hoofdlaager!

I saw the stern silhouette of General Burger coming towards my door. This man casts gloom around him, and he has an evil eye. He it was who received me at the Hoofdlaager. I fell ill immediately, and ever since I have had an intense dislike to the place. So little good do I expect to come out of it that I shall be glad to leave.

A day lost! The despatch of the report asked for by General Joubert has been postponed, and General Burger's sad face confirmed my fears that the war will not end so soon.

Burger, a member of the Executive Council, who, like Joubert and Kock (the unfortunate victim of Elandslaagte), owes

his generalship to the exigencies of the day, represents fairly accurately what MM. — would be in France if presented with the white plumes and placed at the head of our squadrons.

Bearing, however, differs if military practice is unvarying. General Burger—tall, thin, ascetic, with an intensely black horse-shoe beard—which, owing to absence of expression in the eyes and distinction in the lineaments, becomes the characteristic feature of the face—would call up with us the idea of a journeyman carpenter, and one instinctively looks to see if the leg of a compass is not appearing from his trousers pocket. He is a man of great intelligence, severe to himself, and as estimable as he is destitute of attractions. He was a candidate for the presidency at the last election, supported by those who aspire to the most complete effacement of the President. A character like Kruger called for a reaction, and Burger was just the man.

Joubert, doubtless, did not show more firmness, but he adroitly hid any irresoluteness which would give the victory to others. Burger, it is said, knew how to attain an irresponsible frankness devoid of all artifice. When he spoke in public it was with frigid fluency, but with all the authority of an honest man coupled with the imperious conviction of a believer.

General Joubert is quite different in appearance. A little, strong man, with a large, almost white beard, deep-set, keen eyes, and possessed of an amiable and kindly manner, he sits at a small table which is astoundingly out of proportion with the large council-tent which shelters him. By his side is his secretary, writing; opposite is stretched out his son-in-law, who thinks he is increasing his importance by displaying his unconcern. This son-in-law has arrogated the duties of chief of the staff, and seizes upon documents with the eagerness of Father Joseph, so convinced is he that

he bears the Transvaal on his shoulders through the intermediary of his father-in-law.

It is evident that General Joubert is a home-bird, that his family secludes him, and, in lieu of official remuneration, mean to use his influence to the profit of their own little circle. Exceedingly well off, he does not spare them the ample comforts of the best Boer families, though he may make a point of honour of keeping his relatives out of government posts.

Mrs. Joubert, of whom I only caught a glimpse amongst pints of milk and cows, and the passing to and fro of a number of negro-girls, seemed to me the ideal type of a domesticated, rigidly Protestant lady. I felt beyond a doubt that the impression I made on her was, at least, somewhat displeasing, and she had recourse to no hypocritical attitude to make me think otherwise. The opinion of her which I took away tended to reciprocal estrangement. She gave me the impression of a woman who

had grown old in the exercise of her domestic authority to the extent of killing her womanly graces by unbending strictness, which soon destroys a woman's smile. At bottom, everybody said, she was good and kind, and I myself hasten to declare the injustice of an appearance with which, however, I had to be satisfied.

Sauer left this morning for Pretoria, where he will remain when family life has taken possession of him once more. Not possessing the same resources of language as he employed on the blacks, I fear they will pillage everything to kill time. Moreover, the rain fell uninterruptedly, and for want of a tarpaulin, since the departure of the broken waggon, I was obliged to let them enter the tent which protected our tinned provisions. Léon, whom the rain naturally kept indoors, left me to myself; and in the intervals of a few friendly visits, I was able to-day to meditate at my ease.

The situation is thoroughly understood

here, and it is discussed; but nobody commands it. General Joubert's and General Burger's maintenance at Ladysmith is an anomaly; they ought to be at Pretoria, whence they could give strategical guidance, since it is recognised that everybody with the Boers can practise strategy, or rather because strategy in a military sense does not exist. Botha or Lucas Meyer would then be masters of the entire situation in Natal, and, under a military leader who would give precise orders, Ladysmith would be finished with.

Delarey has been appointed to the Cape, and it appears the choice is a good one. It seems to me that the period of military weakness is near its end, otherwise there will be no hope of conquering the English. Since the Boers refuse to take the initiative it is for Lord Roberts to do so.

*January 10.*—A map of the suburbs of Ladysmith had been prepared by an

## WAR NOTES

American engineer. I saw it when calling on the chief of the telegraph service, a European who is most methodical with his papers, nay, too methodical, for since he left the camp it has been impossible, even at the Commander-in-Chief's, to find a copy.

The Boers do not understand and, consequently, are indifferent to geographical maps. That is an additional difficulty in the writing of reports which have to make them clearly understand the utilisation of the ground.

There was to have been a Council of War to-day at General Erasmus' camp. Nothing was decided at the Hoofdlaager yesterday, as the distance, in view of the rain which still falls, was considered too great. It appears Joubert is favourable to re-attacking. This was to have been discussed, as well as Léon's proposal to replace one of the Long Toms and construct an armoured protection for it above the Harrismith camp.



## NEWS FROM LORENZO

The English fire prevented the one placed there at the outset from being maintained. Had the leaders pronounced themselves in favour of these two measures, I should at once have reconnoitred the fort, setting out from the Harrismith camp, which is the nearest point.

But the Council was not held; the Klip rose and prevented the commander of the Free State troops from crossing and me from going to Harrismith. I made a fatiguing and uninteresting excursion to Bulwana with Léon. Arriving back at six o'clock, we went to say good-bye to the general. Everything was decided for the departure and I was again presented to Mrs. Joubert, who, this time, was amiable, even very amiable. I then returned to complete loading the trolley. Léon, who had remained, informed me, however, on his return that, in consequence of serious news from Lorenzo Marquez, all our plans were changed. Lord Roberts, it appeared,

## WAR NOTES

was bringing strong forces to recapture Ladysmith, was making a movement by the right of Colenso, and might already have troops on the Little Tugela.

For lack of reconnaissances and an organised information service, we are at the mercy of every surprise and all sorts of mystifications. The Boers wanted to place a Long Tom to the right of the Colenso position, between the Great and the Little Tugela, but nothing was decided upon, not even the inspection of the place. Really, the enemy has to push the Boers by the shoulders to get them to decide to do anything. Fear of being put to trouble and taking useless precautions makes them systematically refuse enlightenment, and shirk every situation which might be fatiguing or dangerous.

Imagination makes us professional soldiers take premature and objectless measures, because we use it in conjunction with familiar military data. But the Boers have neither

## BOER COMMAND TIMID

imagination nor military data, only good sense, which is satisfied with measures ancient in their simplicity, though justified by undeniable urgency. They do not lead astray, but neither do they prevent anything. When a situation arises a Council of War is called, or, at least, the chief whom it concerns is consulted. Never does an immediate order come from the Commander-in-Chief, as in an organised army, to meet the difficulty. The result is a conversation, at the close of which the ideas of the leader who has to give the order are still more confused than before, men acting only in accordance with their temperament when no definite obligation limits them. A sort of custom of appealing to universal suffrage, which perpetually hampers the mind owing to the necessity for all to be agreed, makes the Boer command incoercibly timid.

If it is true General Roberts, recognising

## WAR NOTES

Buller's error but for more urgent reasons, since the situation of Ladysmith has grown worse, wishes to conduct a first operation in Natal and meet there strong reinforcements, General Joubert ought :—

1. To send a strong reconnoitring party under General Botha in the direction of Estcourt and Weenen to discover the enemy's strength and plans ;

2. To reconnoitre the positions west of the Colenso position, and if it is necessary to spread out, to introduce an isolated detachment, General Botha's position being already unlimited in its bounds ;

3. To see after the reconnaissance if he has still time to strike a fresh blow at Ladysmith, bring up the repaired Long Tom as quickly as possible, place it in position under a protected lodgment near the Harrismith camp, and plan a fresh attack with such precision that there is no possibility this time of failure.

Unless that is done, I very much fear

## A RIDE TO HARRISMITH

we shall confine ourselves to presenting the enemy with a breastplate firmly fixed at Ladysmith and immovable at Colenso.

*January 11.*—I rode to Harrismith laager along a pretty road which branches on to the Plain of Ladysmith, winding across prairies or woods of flowering mimosa. Crossing the river I had to hold my legs above the holsters. After entering the mountains, I skirted the plain until the Long Tom which faces the English camp was reached.

Thence I reached the Klip, where I met a commando going to Colenso. We travelled part of the way together. I then separated from it to find Harrismith by myself, and was fortunate enough to see the laager in the distance. I galloped to it across prairies which were full of horses and herds, and, after a few detours necessitated by dongas, climbed the height where the camp was perched.

## WAR NOTES

I was very courteously received by General de Villiers. He apologised for not being able to accompany me on my reconnaissance, but gave me his secretary and a Boer soldier. We ascended the finest position one could imagine for commanding the plain. The wind blew so strongly that I had difficulty in writing and fixing my glasses. We returned after six hours' absence. To return that night was out of the question, so De Villiers very kindly offering me hospitality I followed him in to dinner. Beef was served, with excellent fresh vegetables: carrots, potatoes and kidney beans. We drank coffee and new milk. I ate like a man who has lived on a cup of coffee from five o'clock in the morning. Most comfortably put up for the night, I slept soundly notwithstanding the wind, the rain, and a few shots fired at the outposts.

*January 12.*—On the return journey,

## FAREWELL TO LADYSMITH

I chose another route away from the mountains and very roundabout. The road was long, most beautiful in parts, far from laagers, winding through cultivated Kaffir country. Here and there were herds of goats, fleecy and white as sheep. I was several times obliged to ask my way, so uncertain was I of it. My horse was tired and coughed a good deal.

Léon tells me we leave this evening for Elandslaagte, and to-morrow morning for Pretoria. About time! The sole of my left boot has come loose, and my harness has wanted mending for a long time. I am in a deplorably tattered state. We left at four o'clock, not without apprehensions on account of our team. After many stoppages and frequent fears we were going to upset, we started off and got along at a good trot. My horse—although roaring a great deal—had a good sixty miles in him.

We settled ourselves at Elandslaagte in

## WAR NOTES

Léon's compartment. He set to work to prepare an excellent dinner, and supplied me with a sumptuous menu, consisting of an onion omelette, fried chicken, French beans, new milk, peaches and jam. We treated ourselves to a bottle of Bordeaux, a portion of which I drank in defiance of doctor's orders. Riding on horseback and the open air are worth all the medicines in the world, and missing meals makes one, when the opportunity offers, do honour to the menu of a gentleman. Our horses were put up in a stable, where, although crowded, they seemed very contented with their good luck. We slept in the compartment, and in bidding good-bye to Ladysmith, my thoughts were that I should probably never see Natal again.

In fact, it appears from the latest news, that the English occupy in force the positions between the two Tugelas which dominate our right at Colenso. Nothing hinders them, therefore, from



## BOERS IMMOBILE

entering the plain which runs between the chains of mountains as far as Ladysmith.

Possibly our Colenso troops might have made their progress perilous by manœuvring on their right flank; but the Boers do not know how to leave their positions to manœuvre. As a result, the English will come into collision with the Free State laagers, south of Ladysmith, which are much too weak numerically to resist, a fact which the Boers will not perceive until after the event, and consequently much too late. It is this characteristic of the Boers which prevents them taking preparatory measures or collecting information, and which makes all staff work with them illusory.

With the one exception of General Botha, who continually visits his positions and understands the importance of observations made to him, I have been unable up to now to obtain anything but approbation—never a decision!

## WAR NOTES

How can General Joubert, his intelligence notwithstanding, be convinced of the necessity for any particular step, since he does not ride, and there is no one with him in whom he can confide militarily to appreciate a situation? He relies on momentary resolutions, and nobody tries to act apart from him; in fine, he awaits the English to decide one way or the other.

This renders the English offensive tactics easy up to the very point of attacking, and allows their slowness, so contrary to the spirit of warfare, to have no ill effects. I shall be very astonished—if the English are really in force between the two Tugelas—if they do not succeed this time in relieving Ladysmith. But I am allowing events to carry me along, and since the exodus to the Free State is in course I am going that way, certain that the situation will be unravelled there, and that the deliverance of General White will only be an incident.

## THE DUNDEE FIGHT

There has been four days' fighting at Colesberg, with success on our side, proving at least that the English concentrate there. I continue, however, to relate only what I see, newspaper accounts presenting facts in so heroic a style that it is impossible to attribute the least value to them.

*January 13.*—We left at seven o'clock, after a protracted loading of our compartment. At Glencoe I met Degeorges and visited M. de Sainte-Croix's bakery, which works night and day, and makes excellent bread.

I examined the position of Dundee. The town is situated on a plain surrounded by mountains. General Lucas Meyer, with two guns and two Maxims, arrived (on October 19th) on the height nearest Dundee, and opened fire on the English camp, which was unguarded, the troops being at lunch. How could the English leave their infantry on a height where there was artillery, in-

## WAR NOTES

stead of bringing it down to a stone wall which intersected the slope crosswise? They attempted an attack against Lucas Meyer, but the Boers charged them up to this stone wall. Erasmus, with his troops and all his artillery, occupied another height near the railway, which would have allowed him to outflank the English. But he did not move, on the pretext that the fog prevented him. However, he had occasion, in spite of himself, to capture an English detachment which had gone astray in trying to outflank Lucas Meyer's right. In addition, a commando blocked the plain to the south, and did not move until all was over and the English had escaped. They slipped away in the direction of Ladysmith by making a big detour to the east of Dundee, abandoning everything on the battle-field, including tinned provisions and their lunch.

*January* 14. — Arrived at Pretoria. I stopped at MM. Léon and Grünberg's.

## BLOEMFONTEIN

*January 15.*—Received first letters from France!

*January 16.*—I wrote an article for *La Liberté*; then made preparation for departure.

*January 17.*—Steeplechase after horses and mules, horse-shoes and harness, etc. Scarcity of chocolate. Much appreciated a present of some from a big grocer—a relative of General Delarey,—who absolutely refused to let me pay for a pound which he hunted out from under some sticks. I met Mr. Arthur Lynch, a journalist, who has been sent to me by Colonel Monteil. It was too late for the train, so we postponed our departure until to-morrow.

*January 18.*—Our departure for Bloemfontein was made under excellent conditions. Our mules were harnessed afresh, our saddles and boots skilfully mended; we had five

## WAR NOTES

boys with us; and our compartment was comfortably fitted up. An afternoon must be counted for the satisfactory stowing away and placing in order, according to degree of urgency and weight, of objects so various. I was able yesterday to get to the Mission Fathers, and had the church opened for a moment by a Sister, who, as usual, was accessible and good.

At Elandsfontein, Dupont, accompanied by Sauvier, brought me four boxes full of succulent things, such as truffled turkey, wines, liqueurs, fruits of all kinds, and choice tinned foods. There we were provided for the journey! The weather also promised well; a final downpour came and the sun commenced its great cleaning.

The temperature was delicious. Luncheon over, we conversed, easy about our horses our minds at rest as regards our preparations; pleased to feel ourselves borne towards the fresh theatre of war where was a promise of important events; our hearts joyful because

## BLOEMFONTEIN

everything promised well, and we felt ourselves in a condition to go far.

A company of cyclists has been distributed amongst the generals. Captain Theron, who formed it, came to shake hands with me. He wore a green uniform edged with yellow. Like ourselves he is *en route* for the Free State. I had not noticed these cyclists at Ladysmith, where the telegraph worked everywhere; but at the time of the invasion of Natal they did their duty as estafettes brilliantly.

*January 19.*—The Vaal flows through a plain, even with the ground, its course hidden in the distance by a few clumps of trees. Almost as soon as one has crossed, it runs parallel to the railway. The train stopped for the night at Viljoen's Drift, the Customs of the Free State. We set off again at five o'clock. The journey was continued — monotonously — through a green plain, limited on the horizon by no moun-

## WAR NOTES

tain, and, at times, animated by large herds. On all sides fields of indian-corn. Civilisation was much more apparent from the general aspect of things than in the Transvaal.

Kroonstad is a small town amongst small trees, with water. The ground, which is chalky, forms little kopjes; and in this flat country it would be a military position.

Then we saw some mimosa woods, a magnificent farm buried amongst willows, near the railway, and cultivated land which happily broke the monotony of grassy wastes. The herds were not frightened by the train. A secretary-bird gravely strutted about, seeking for serpents with an attentive air without noting our black convoy. From time to time isolated and slightly wooded kopjes rose on the plain, generally to the east. This prairie is the rearing-ground for the finest Boer horses.

I met at Brandfort Père Guillet, of Meslay, Mayenne, who told me he had been



## BLOEMFONTEIN

there for fourteen years, and expressed his enthusiasm for the Boers.

Arrived at Bloemfontein at half-past six. Night was falling. Unloaded in semi-darkness. At the hotel at nine, but could get no dinner; so we got out Dupont's truffled turkey, a bottle of 1881, peaches and pears, and dined in our bedroom like men who keep *réveillon*.

*January 20.*—With its covered market on the central square, full of animation, its ox-waggons arranged in long rows and the teams lying down, its open shops and awnings let down over the shining windows, its trees which spring up everywhere and blend with the red roofs, Bloemfontein in the morning is a pretty place. The colour of the buildings is generally light and in agreeable shades. The burnt-brick colour of the Pretoria buildings is here softened by whitish pavilions, light-coloured domes, and, above all, by a framework of greenery,—suburbs

## WAR NOTES

of gardens, groups of trees, among which especially abound the eucalyptus and dishevelled, drooping varieties of cypress and silvered pines. The large buildings also are varied in form as in colour; but ever sober and light in their elegance, infinitely pleasing in contrast to the heavy severity of Pretoria. The temple rests against a wooded hill; two white spires stand out against the dark mass of the mountain and frame a simple and harmonious church. A big opening, ending with a monument to those who died for the Independence, serves as an avenue, which curves upwards harmoniously, extending the view and giving importance to this very simple commemorative building.

We entered the crowded market. Provisions were quickly sold. Merely in the time we took to walk round, the legs of lamb upon which we had had an eye were gone. On very clean stalls were sold—neatly arranged in heaps, or bundles,—carrots, turnips, kidney beans, potatoes, tomatoes, green corn,

## BLOEMFONTEIN

onions, peaches, pears, curds, and pretty pats of butter wrapped in muslin. We bought some vegetables, eggs, butter, and, at a butcher's shop, a leg of mutton and some meat for our Kaffirs.

When that was done, we called on the Government, expressing a wish for a trolley to carry our fodder to the Modder River. They sent to find one, and soon we saw it arrive, ready loaded, so that we can set off without delay. In fact, we must be at General Cronje's camp to-morrow night.

Bloemfontein seems as calm as though war had never been declared. Its resources are not so exhausted as those of Pretoria, and thus we were able to get some chocolate.

I regret to hear President Steyn is at Ladysmith. I have seen a German, who is attached to the Free State Artillery as a captain. He has been in South Africa for twenty-four years, served with the English

## WAR NOTES

during the Zulu war, and was an intimate friend of General Buller.

The proximity of the English is felt here. A fair number of English still remain, even with the Railway Company which belongs to the State. The way in which they conciliate the exigencies of their duties with those of their patriotism would make a subject for a curious study on the egoistic interest which can prevail in an English heart.

Our route was sandy; the barren soil produces hardly anything but the grass of marshy land. Soon, the plain was broken by small, uniform kopjes. Night falling, we followed the road in the dark. The boy with the trolley loaded with fodder took out two of his mules to harness them to a waggon he was driving; his idea was to take us to a farm-hotel, provided with a stable for horses. The night became so dark and the road so sandy that we proceeded at walking pace. We passed

## TOWARDS THE MODDER

ox-waggon, but guessed at rather than saw them. At last a light shone and, serving as a guide, led us to a house where we stopped. My opinion was that we ought to camp there; but the Bloemfontein boy was anxious about his stable, and had already set off again.

My anxiety increased. Léon confessed he could see absolutely nothing, but relied on the boy. At times we thought we could detect lights, which vanished immediately like wills-o'-the-wisp. But at last a real light came in sight. At half-past nine o'clock the boys were pushing the waggon on foot towards a house. Suddenly, one in front blundered, and the waggon, colliding with a projection, heeled over and fell with a big crash of crockery and bottles. We were momentarily stupefied. Léon jumped from his horse and gave the stupid fellow who caused the accident a taste of his rhinoceros-hide whip. The mules were unharnessed. I knew the situation

## WAR NOTES

and gave the most practical advice. There was nothing for it but to unload. As the broken boxes were taken out by the light of a lantern the extent of the disaster became apparent. The peaches were squashed by the turkey, the ground coffee had come out of its box and was mixed with the biscuits, the leg of mutton was under my canteen, the carrots were mingled with the stable utensils, the eggs had become an omelette before their time and were crushed against a roll of blankets, and over all this horrible mess was the water from broken bottles. A voice, at each fresh discovery, added to the heart-rending list of our losses. The most important thing, however, was the waggon, the chief parts of which seemed intact at first sight. But it had to be raised. We all set to work and succeeded. Only a wheel remained caught in the ironwork of the splinter-bar; and with a hammer we disorganised the ironwork. Then we reloaded

## TOWARDS THE MODDER

and retired to our room. It was nearly eleven o'clock. The turkey was so high that it was uneatable, and we had to dine on a pat of fresh butter.

We retired to rest in a sad mood, for we could discover nought but subjects for lamentation in the heterogeneous mixtures in our boxes, in the over-ripe fruit, and in our broken property. We slept badly. I passed my time listening to the big ox-waggons passing on the road, the teams urged on by savage cries or wrapped round by the driver's hissing thong.

*January 21.*—We were at the Leeuwvley Farm. We slept with our door open, but the sky was overcast, and when the light entered it was late; we were not up until five o'clock. It had been arranged that we should be off at eight, halt at a farm at noon, and set off again at two. We were to leave the Petrusburg road and follow one not so bad. Anyway, we shall not

## WAR NOTES

reach the laager until about ten o'clock to-morrow.

Departure at 9.30 on a very heavy, sandy road. We proceeded at a pace. A storm, travelling quicker than we did, came upon us about noon, and, having no cloak, I got wet to the skin. The rain, mixed with hailstones, was so violent that it became a torture for the face and made one fear for one's eyes. Outstripping our convoy, we galloped away at full speed and reached the farm of a Boer, who received us with customary cordiality and put our horses under shelter. Meanwhile the waggons arrived and camped on the road. We lunched on tinned partridge and milk, due to the Boer's kindness. There was great difficulty in setting off again, the Bloemfontein boy still sticking to his idea about a stable, so we had to make him thoroughly understand that we should camp anywhere but where he wanted to be.

Before leaving, we allowed the boys to



## TOWARDS THE MODDER

smoke their pipe—a practice which was quite new to me. A small hole in the ground received the tobacco, placed on a small stone. By means of a stick, a hole four inches long and communicating with the tobacco is made in the sand or clay. When this is done they light up. The Kaffir who sacrifices himself for another—for the pipe can be used by several—begins operations. He takes a mouthful of water, and, gargling with a great noise, fills his mouth with smoke. Then he spits out the water and coughs suffocatingly, after which he takes long and violent draws, which provoke a cough and a rather bitter pleasure for the smoker.

We camped at half-past six near a laager, after having (in spite of the boy) passed Abraham's Kraal, a pretty but rather unhealthy spot, surrounded by water, near the Modder River. Trees, even fruit-trees, were everywhere around us, and water-birds rose on all sides. In following our

## WAR NOTES

mules, which were taken out to drink as there was no water at the camp, we came across the most poetic drift I have ever seen. On the right, under the dense shade of the trees, flowed the river, which passed over a little barrier of black rocks; on the left it widened between magnificent willows, and, notwithstanding the commotion of men and animals with which its banks were thronged, it maintained an air of mysterious privacy, filled with birds. Opposite, a herd of red and black oxen slowly left the water, after slaking their thirst, and remounted the bank. Naked Boers were bathing with the horses. One of them came to converse with Léon, and, because of his modest embarrassment, I thought to myself—so strong is prejudice—how infinitely superior is the civilised man when dressed to another accidentally deprived of clothing.

Whilst the mules were being unharnessed at our quarters, I went to reconnoitre the

## TOWARDS THE MODDER

river. A hare and several plovers started up. On my return I conversed with a Boer, who has a French name, and became intimate with him. I assisted Léon, hastily, to set the camp in order, and took charge of the cooking. Well! I must acknowledge that in an hour and a quarter I had a leg of mutton roasted to a turn, with remarkable *pommes château*, in addition to *pommes au beurre*, a little too much mixed with caramel but still very appetising. This meal, completed by fruit, a bowl of curds and a cup of tea, revived us; and we slept soundly under our little tent half-open to a patch of starlight sky.

*January 22.*—The day opened splendidly. The perfume of mimosas was wafted to us from the river banks. The very large flowers of this plant are rarely bunched together, as in Natal, but are isolated on prickly branches.

Suddenly, the driver rushed on to the

## WAR NOTES

prairie like a madman, and we saw an enormous flock of korhaans (a kind of heath-cock) running as fast as they could towards the thicket. There were also rabbits. I galloped to see them near at hand. The korhaan holds an intermediate place between the partridge and the guinea-fowl, and, relying on its legs, like the land-rail, does not fly until you are actually upon it.

The plain was sandy, not with that red, clayey sand which sticks to the wheels; but with white, light sand, allowing our waggons to travel at a good pace. The river-side trees were alive with birds, and sent us unceasingly numbers of impetuous lapwings which passed like large swallows uttering their wild cry. A troop of ostriches came to us in battle array, then broke into column, wheeled about, and made off manœuvring all the time. The plain, which is covered with a harsh plant similar to the "drinn" of the Sahara, was crowded with herds. These tufts made it

## TOWARDS THE MODDER

green, and the ground was favourable to long gallops. We marched towards the drift which was to enable us to cross the Modder and afterwards reach the camps. We lunched near a farm, the animals attached, and then continued our journey to try to arrive this evening, which is not yet certain.

The road continued through one of those Algerian landscapes which are ever before me, landscapes of the Southern Algeria one loves—in spite of its sand, its aridness, and sometimes its devastation—because of its limitless expanse and the feeling of boundlessness evoked by it. Here was the same sand, covered with a somewhat woody vegetation, the same tufts of "drinn," and the same clouds of locusts which, at times, lash the face. In the distance, a few black kopjes which in places bound the horizon. And the same striking mirages.

## WAR NOTES

*January 23.*—The resemblances to South Algerian scenery multiplied as we proceeded. After the sand came the "reg" and the "guetaf," camel's grass, shrubs with thorny leaves, like only desert produces, to protect them against greedy mouths which they irritate beyond measure; then the ground whitened, and here and there between small trees, planted like an oasis in the desert, appeared a small farm. Water was obtainable there from a well, and conducted by trenches flowed into gardens and fields of indian-corn; but the pretty picture one sees in the Mزاب of a well and an ass with the automatic catch which empties the bucket was missing. Sometimes the water which has collected in pools on the ground makes all kinds of fruit trees grow. For instance, at the farm where we had luncheon, after missing our way, was a garden where, as in a paradise, were growing the vine, peach trees, Barbary fig trees, etc., and all kinds of grasses which the Kaffirs smoke.

## TOWARDS THE MODDER

We were on the Jacobsdal road. After lunching on eggs and milk we again set off, our horses refreshed by three or four sheaves of corn. The waggon and the cart followed as well as possible, which is not saying much for it. We discovered we had again gone astray, and had still two hours' journey to Cronje's camp. But we knew what time and distance were in this country! Yesterday, when worn-out but desirous of getting as near as possible to the camp, we asked at a farm if there were another in the neighbourhood which would enable us to march just one hour longer. A kopje in the shape of a sugar-loaf was pointed out to us, and with a downward movement of the hand, which indicates your destination behind the object in view, we were told "Dar!" But after the kopje there were other kopjes—ever a fresh obstacle—and no farm. Impossible to stop for want of water and fear that the mules might give out. At last, after two hours and a half of harassing ex-

## WAR NOTES

pectation, we reached the farm we had been told was quite near. Explanations were clearer this time. But it was more by good luck than anything else we reached a laager for the waggons, where I drank without pleasure some unsugared black coffee, and where we were told of the exact position of Cronje's camp. We reached it at last, and were admirably received by the general.

Not tall but stoutly built, an energetic and kindly head, a frank look, an open countenance, and the happy expression of one who feels in his element—such is General Cronje. In time of peace he was to be seen walking about with a stick; somewhat bent, old, and tired in expression. But since the war he stands erect. His activity is extraordinary. He visits his positions every day, reprimanding for faults, rectifying errors; very severe, or, what is better, very strict.

By his orders trenches are covered with branches and grass to hide them; tents are



## CRONJE

forbidden. The men bivouac under huts, ever at their positions, keeping guard at night by turns, and, at three in the morning, everybody up.

Rules are extremely severe: we were told at nine o'clock, whilst we were still chattering over our leg of mutton, to put out our light. I have had a talk with the general. Like his comrades, he attributes to God everything he does or conceives. That did not prevent him explaining to me his method of holding with 4000 to 5000 Boers such extensive positions as he occupies. At the flanks he places 500 of his best men under picked leaders, because these are dangerous points; he supports these as well as he can, and places himself in the centre with a large reserve to guard against unforeseen events. Aided by his adjutants, whom he has galloping along the line of battle, he sees to everything. A glance is enough to guide him on so extensive a battle-field; adjutants, acquainted with his intentions, fill his place.

## WAR NOTES

General Cronje makes a principle of picking off the enemy, and not firing in volleys, each shot having to bring down a man, which quickly produces an intense moral shock.

The work of arranging our quarters being over at nightfall, and greatly facilitated by everybody's kindness, we prepared to visit the Modder River position on the morrow with the general.

*January* 24. — General Cronje's headquarters at the Modder River Camp.

About four o'clock yesterday we were in sight of General Cronje's camp, but, from no matter what side you penetrate, you must arrive at the laager to see it. It forms a large rectangle of waggons and tents, with only a few services inside and the general near the angle formed by the front and right sides. We galloped towards his tent and introduced ourselves to him. He was with Mrs. Cronje, another lady, and some Boers. Affectionate and chatty, his welcome could

## CRONJE

not have been more cordial ; he was quite unlike the severe and silent leader who had been described to me. He reminds one of General Lucas Meyer in face, but he is not so tall, especially when sitting down as we saw him.

He told us that the English were asleep ; that they only awoke to send a few volleys of shells, which had never done any harm to any one. He has asked for a 155 in order to stir them up in their rear. He made an appointment for the next day at dawn to visit the positions. At the same time he told us there had been fighting for three days past at Colenso ; but the English seemed to have lost all hope of crossing.

After taking coffee we left the general, who, though he did not disclose his plans, was affable, master of his subject, kindly, and showed an essentially military frankness, with an air of authority, which was most impressive. He gave us everything we needed, the best position for our quarters,

## WAR NOTES

quite near to him; and we hastened to put things in order. During this time, the correspondent of the Johannesburg *Standard* came to speak to me, and also Count Sternberg, an Austrian nobleman, a most sympathetic man, who, like Galopaud, arrived on board the *König*. He came here direct from Pretoria. He complains about their inactivity here, and envies those who are at Colenso.

Alas! when there I envied those on the Modder River. It is for the English to restore beneficent activity to us, since the Boers profess a love of positions, as in Montecuculi's day, only with this difference, that that general changed them sometimes whilst we seem destined to remain until doomsday.

People will never understand this war, its duration and the extraordinary successes of this passive defence, if the English army is described as a European army. It is an army without energy, or ideas, or tactics, or

## THE BRITISH ARMY

*morale*—I refer to the rank and file ; an army which remains stock-still opposite the Boers because it has neither sufficient worth to do anything nor enough endurance to abandon its comforts for a matter of three days. It is a fine thing to demilitarise a nation by degrading the military calling to the lowest degree! But since empire in this world is kept by force, let those who abdicate the one cease to pretend to the other, let them take a subordinate position. Bluff is no longer sufficient, and one might take long odds, if the experiment was carried out to the end, that a weak place would be discovered in that famous British Navy; for when the military spirit has descended to such a degree of decadence in a nation, it would be astonishing if the isolated life aboard preserved the British sailor's mind from all contact with the English mind.

I had succeeded this morning in getting to sleep, after many enervating and fruit-

## WAR NOTES

less efforts resulting from the feverishness which the heat has caused me for two days past, when I was informed that the general would be on horseback in five minutes. Corn for the horses—hasty cocoa and tea—rapid toilet—and there we were in the saddle! We found the general ready to do likewise; but, as something called for his attention, and he had not the time to take us to all the positions, which are very extensive, he entrusted us to his adjutant, who has been under his orders for twenty years and knows the country like himself. He was a little Boer, quite grey, mounted on a small bay mare, which he managed like an old comrade by treating it kindly, and which knew only a measured gallop and a kind of ambling step. As a companion, he had a big Boer, a fine fellow, who spoke English well, one of the general's aides-de-camp; mounted on a superb grey horse of big size and rather

## THE MODDER POSITIONS

stupid instinct. We set off towards the English.

After fording the Modder River, we rose to a tolerably grassy plain, and soon found plenty to amuse us. Many persons of my acquaintance, zealous followers of Saint Hubert, would not have felt dull there either, and I doubt if they could have resisted the temptation of risking a few shots, notwithstanding General Cronje's orders and punishments. Every gun-shot fired off duty is punishable by three hours on a cannon, or six hours' work in the trenches, or a fine of £5. On all sides of us, then, there started partridges, in braces or in coveys, hares and rabbits, which were all the more exciting as they presented a magnificent mark. But temptation became especially exasperating at the sight of a string of sixty steinboks, white as gazelles, which turned round and grouped themselves in front of us three hundred yards away. Boer or not, it would have

## WAR NOTES

been difficult for a man not to hit this mark. As we abstained from firing, the pretty animals continued their light evolutions, scattering or forming anew, at times unwinding their bounding chain, at others halting in a group with their heads in the air.

Meanwhile, we crossed the henceforth historic plain of Magersfontein, and from a kopje, where our left artillery had been advanced, were able to examine the English positions at leisure. They were disposed between the Modder and the Riet; open in brigades, as near the water as possible, with the railway station to the rear of their right and well within reach. A few tents under the trees were evidently service departments and headquarters. However, in the distance, against a chain of kopjes, near Jacobsdal, the tents of a battalion seemed so detached from the main body of troops that they would be a great temptation to leaders less careful of their men than the



## THE MODDER POSITIONS

Boer generals. We advanced still farther, reached a kopje nearer, had a good look at the English tents and their infantile fortifications of ashlar, and then returned towards the Modder River.

The river crossed—not without having inspected the locality—we reached the left of Cronje's positions. The skilfully chosen line—part natural, part artificial—completely bars the way to Kimberley; but its flanks are exposed, and, even in this country, its extent is disproportionate to the force. It rests at one end on the Modder and at the other on the last kopjes which block the Plain of Kimberley to the west of the railway. Commander Cronje, the general's brother, has the honour of being at the latter, most difficult post. The danger of being outflanked by way of Jacobsdal by a march which would bring the English to the Modder and his rear makes the general smile. The twenty years he has

## WAR NOTES

been fighting the English have taught him that they are incapable of doing without the railway for a single hour, as it brings them their unceasing supplies, and consequently, he does not fear for his left. According to him, if they sent a body of horsemen it would be surrendering them to him, for they would certainly be captured; if, on the other hand, they came in force they would meet with such difficulties as regards victualling that they would not get beyond a march. From the Modder, near the spur which may be considered the key of the position, and which forms the angle of two perpendicular chains of kopjes rising on the plain, runs a long series of trenches skilfully hidden under branches, and provided with an important range. The men are on guard at night by turns. Tents are forbidden because they would disclose the trenches; the soldiers bivouac under huts made of leaves which, in the distance, are confounded with the ground.

## THE MODDER POSITIONS

Near the kopjes a large hole has been left in these fortifications. But the opening is only a sham ; and its success at Magersfontein was brilliant. Before dawn on the day of the battle (December 11th) General Cronje was on a kopje near this gap, which crosses the chain. He had seven men with him. In front, the Boers held the first line of heights. Wishing to surround them there, the English had advanced at night so as to reach the opening before daybreak and wind round the kopjes. They were not seen by the Boers, and almost escaped the general's escort, which, in the darkness, mistook them for their own side. Their helmets, however, betrayed them. Immediately, Cronje ordered his escort to open fire and bring down a man with every shot. Their precision, in fact, became terrifying. The firing of these seven men seemed to give them imposing numerical strength. The English fell one on the top of the other before

## WAR NOTES

they could draw up; surprised, they came to the conclusion they were discovered, and retraced their steps. Soon received by the Boers who had let them pass, they hastened their retreat; and notwithstanding the open space before them, which was then undefended by any trench, they did not dare to cross it that day.

To the rear of the trenches which we visited, the ground rises and forms an artillery position answering to the very fine one occupied by the English. Between these two eminences is quite a cemetery of freshly turned red earth and hastily made tumuli pointing in all directions. Debris of horses, wheels of gun-carriages bearing traces of shells, and mangled mimosa told the whole story of the great conflict of yesterday!

When on the spur we visited the gun there and Herr von Heitz, the most amiable German officer who so devotedly works it. He would not let us leave

## THE MODDER POSITIONS

without making a hole in his poor stock of provisions by giving us a good tea.

At the camp, which is responsible for the guns, we found the old commander of Potchefstroom and his six sons. The seventh is still in hospital. This leader had his thigh pierced at Mafeking, and, as soon as he was able, he rejoined the Boers. He still commands, though not yet able to ride, following his men on foot on the nearest kopje. He is the ancient and austere kind of Boer, his muscles as rigid as his principles; unparalleled in faith and in endurance. He has shown us every attention. He is very proud of his 3000 men—the best in Cronje's division—and so placed that they surround others less seasoned.

After a visit to Commander Cronje, who has a fine military bearing like his brother, we returned at a gallop, and it took us almost two hours to cover the length of the Modder River positions.

## WAR NOTES

*January 25.*—We left early for Kimberley, after saluting the general. Our business was to make a tour of the besieged town, and find a position sufficiently near to mount a Long Tom and utilise its startling effects against a town we knew was at its last extremity. The Kaffirs, whom the English drive away under pain of being shot, state that the women and children are sometimes trampled under foot during the distribution of rations. They still have flour and indian-corn; but everything else is lacking, or about to give out.

A Boer accompanied us, and we trotted away at a great rate. Léon's black servant lost his water-bottle containing our sole supply. Yesterday's rain had made the ground muddy; my horse slipped on the clayey soil; and the sun, with stormy intentions, poured down its heat. But at last we got on a magnificent road made by the English, and which, skirting the railway fairly closely, led to Kimberley.

## RECONNOITRING KIMBERLEY

We stopped at a conduit whence poured clear water, forming a little pool at which our horses slaked their thirst. Lying flat on my stomach I drank at the pipe. A taste of chocolate and biscuit, and we were again on the gallop. We next reached a farm surrounded by trees, asked our way, and passed on. Then we crossed some black kopjes forming a fine position, which would again enable Cronje to stop the English troops opposite Kimberley. Finally, we reached a long building, where, in a kind of wine-press with open doors, were some Boers.

Taking with us a gunner, who wished to show us his small mountain Krupp, we mounted the gentle incline which rises towards Kimberley. From the top of the trenches which mark out the Boer position, we saw the town, the mines, the circular fort on a kopje commanding the town, and a series of heights on the left, which were unoccupied and might be made some use of

## WAR NOTES

for the attack. When returning, the officer in command came up and took us into a house to offer us water-melons. I drank at a pail, having in this respect adopted a horse's manners. We then proceeded to the laager of General Ferreira, who a fortnight ago was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Free State troops, just as Joubert commands those of the Transvaal. The journey was a long one. Ever the word "Dar" and a downward movement of the hand over the kopje, which they seem almost able to touch, added to an insinuating gesture towards those terrible kopjes, as though introducing a spoon under the carapace of a spiny lobster. These windings of the hand after the word "Dar" are a horror to me, because then you have to wind round so many obstacles of such a multiplicity of shapes that you despair of ever arriving at your destination.

We trotted along without hope, though at a lively pace. My poor horse Colenso



## RECONNOITRING KIMBERLEY

became terribly fatigued. At last, in a labyrinth of black kopjes, after skirting Kimberley for a long time without encountering a laager or a Boer, we came across some waggons, and were soon at the house where General Ferreira camped. He received us at first most coldly, and, despite General Joubert's letter, which Léon handed to him, put us in the ante-room. That was too much for our dignity, so we left and saddled our horses, to leave immediately. Whilst so doing the storm broke over our heads and forced us to take refuge in the general's stable. I was occupied in drinking at a spout in the most animal fashion when Ferreira came up and invited us to join him, stating that it would take us at least six hours to reach General du Toit's laager, the only place we could sleep. And, when we persisted in our intention to leave, he apologised, saying he had not read General Joubert's letter, but only a note from General Cronje handed to him at the same time, and

## WAR NOTES

which spoke of sending four prisoners. This had made him indifferent to us, if indeed there had not been some confusion.

We then accepted his hospitality, and I must say that the general and his staff did everything they could by showing us kindnesses to make us forget the unpleasant recollection of our first reception.

*January 26.*—We received confirmation yesterday evening of the great success at Colenso. The English have been definitely repulsed, 1200 of them killed or wounded, 170 taken prisoners. There was three days' fighting on the Tugela, and a way was cut through to the right of the Colenso positions. The Boer losses were only 100 killed or wounded.

We all slept in the same room. The general snored tremendously. After thinking it was the rumbling of cannon, I amused myself by listening to it shake our tin roof. With that touching hospitality of which the

## RECONNOITRING KIMBERLEY

Boers possess the secret, we were admirably put up.

On rising at dawn I discovered Sternberg buried under blankets. He had arrived at one in the morning.

He left with us under a Boer escort. The general's adjutant accompanied us and showed us the laagers. Whilst making our journey around Kimberley, we met numbers of steinboks, and "korhaans" rose with long cries at our approach. Once, the adjutant told the field-cornet, who was in charge of the escort, to kill a buck. The Boer dismounted, took aim, and shot the animal dead. It was placed on the horse of a black attendant.

We dined at General du Toit's, whose quarters are in the works for pumping water to Kimberley.

After the decisive success at Colenso we hear of another victory at Colesberg. These English are making themselves incorrigible laughing-stocks, and, without a doubt, are played out!

## WAR NOTES

After a fairly long stay at General du Toit's, we visited the positions. At the Kampfersdam Mine was an insignificant gun—it would be a magnificent position for a Long Tom. Opposite was a small ridge, supporting what they are pleased to call an English fort. On the other side another declivity, in all probability, and then Kimberley, which one can see lengthwise with its mines, its fortress, its buildings and corrugated-iron roofs. The plan of attack is as follows: become master of this rideau, where the English have constructed a field-fort which can be easily captured, first place the Boers there behind trenches and then bring up the Long Tom to enfilade the town. Time necessary—a week at most.

General du Toit—slender, graceful, young, black-bearded, very rich, and a member of the Volksraad—informed of our return, we reached another laager commanded by General Kolbe, of the Free

## RECONNOITRING KIMBERLEY

State, skirting many trenches which on the south-west give rather an appearance of laying siege to this phantasy Kimberley. The general was there with his five brothers—splendid men. He is small, but active and sinewy; dismounts at a bound and takes aim; jumps over a horse without touching it; is most kindly, affable, and well liked, which does not prevent him being very soldierlike and enthusiastic over his profession. Owing to his fear of being cut off, or rather for want of water, he has moved back far too much. One consequence of the choice of a distant position is that his field-piece, even firing at random, is absolutely useless. He has magnificently fortified it at a spot hidden by abattis, and he moves it from place to place at will to deceive the enemy. The infantry trenches, which are very carefully arranged, most extensive, and well guarded, are a proof of his care. But my astonishment was great to see with what scrupulous care

## WAR NOTES

he had prepared for retreat, should that become necessary, and how judicious was his study of the ground.

Judging from the pleasure with which this general showed me his defences and told me of his plans, it was evident he was one of those who do honour to an army because of their high sense of a soldier's duties.

The dinner he gave us under his corrugated-iron shelter, situated between the boulders of a kopje in a position of observation, especially left a recollection of his amiability.

All three of us and the general afterwards retired to rest under his tent, amidst such a promiscuousness of blankets that each took what he could without thinking of the others. The general, in his goodness, at every moment gave us fruit, especially peaches, which he thought we preferred. Surely some of the stones must have got under my shoulder-bones

## RECONNOITRING KIMBERLEY

and other protuberances, for turning over was as painful as it was difficult to keep in one position!

*January 27.*—Yesterday and the previous day we visited the environs of Kimberley and the inconceivably extensive Boer positions. Arriving by way of Alexanderfontein, where there is a mountain-piece at an illusory distance, we reached Olifantsfontein, where at a farm belonging to the De Beers Company, outside the circle of investment, General Ferreira has his headquarters. The next day we crossed the Plain of Kimberley, in full view of the town, and noticed with interest only one height, south-east of Dronfield Station, whence could be obtained a very fine view, but which was at too great a distance (9800 yards) from the town.

It was only when we reached the Kampfersdam Mine, where one of our guns, in view of its size, was useless, that we

## WAR NOTES

found the ideal position. It is a question of making a platform there, all the easier consolidated as the ground is artificial. Opposite, at 1900 yards, is a rideau supporting an English fort, which could be captured after a few shots. From that place we could rake the town from end to end, and particularly the rich quarter, where every shot would tell. The Boers, of course, would have to support the forward movement by occupying the positions as they were captured. But their work would really be greatly facilitated by the 155 at Kampfersdam which would commence to silence the nearest of the English works, that of Ottoskopje Mine.

Kampfersdam Mine is beyond the works whence Kimberley got its water supply. The place where General du Toit camps is a very fine piece of engineering due to English engineers.

In the morning we left our halting-place for General Kolbe's laager. The general



## RECONNOITRING KIMBERLEY

led us from the other side of the railway to a pretty house, named Scotchfarm, surrounded by large orange-trees, and unusually comfortable. A charming five-year old child with light hair down her back and pretty laughing eyes — a little pink and white beauty—ran up and flung her arms round the general's neck. It was his daughter. Shortly afterwards we were introduced to Mrs. Kolbe; and whilst lunching in a large dining-room we saluted in succession Mrs. Kolbe's mother—Mrs. Pretorius—and her sister. The young woman does not resemble the little girl in the slightest. Tall, dark, rather luxuriant in her charms, she is a fine and agreeable lady. She saw to our wants with the delicate foresight of a hostess. The sister—her eyes dark and profound under her large Boer cap, so embellished with frills and yet so practical—was somewhat surprised at our invasion. She took off her cap, and looked very young with her silky profusion of light hair, the pallor and

## WAR NOTES

delicacy of features of a figure in a stained-glass window, and her light, graceful movements. Her art was finished in its simplicity. Their mother retained in bearing and in dress the severity of widows in this country. Still young and by nature of great distinction, her regular face with its flat head-bands reminded one of certain portraits of the time of Catherine of Medici, in which the mind gained the mastery over beauty. A whole epoch separates her and her daughters. What will the distance be in the case of the general's pretty pink and white daughter, who, in this South Africa, which is proceeding at full speed towards our advanced European civilisation, will be a great heiress?

I confessed to the general that, amidst those cool and comfortable surroundings, he appeared to me to be less in his element than amongst the black stones of his kopje. But were not we—sunburnt, insufficiently washed, and in questionable flannels—in the

## RETURN TO CRONJE

same category? Anyway, I cannot forgive myself for having, by our arrival, deprived him of a night under that familiar roof, where his family, who had come from Bloemfontein for a few days only, awaited him. His good grace had not allowed me to suspect it for a moment. From Scotchfarm we returned to Cronje's camp, where we found neither mules nor boys. Everything I notice in these blacks is unfavourable. In the evening, with Sternberg, who is a capital fellow and a charming conversationalist, we drank some of Dupont's famous Burgundy, and ate a leg of the gazelle which the field-cornet killed. The meat had not improved by being dragged about in the saddle for two days.

*January* 28.—Sunday: a rest day. Received a telegram from MM. de Bréda and de Charette, who have arrived by the *Gironde*, asking where it would be preferable for them to go.

## WAR NOTES

Sternberg says all Frenchmen are born cooks.

Seven or eight Frenchmen, officers and non-commissioned officers, have arrived. They are coming with the Long Tom. I hope to make use of them at Kimberley.

*January 29.*—I had a walk with General Cronje to the spot where he wants to place the Long Tom in case the armoured train, which has been constructed in London, comes to repair the railroad opposite him. All that is vague; the place, though well chosen, is useless. A platform, however, is going to be made there.

General Cronje—dressed in loose trousers and a nut-brown overcoat, turned green with age, a large grey hat on his head, and his back slightly bowed—is totally unlike what we in France call a general. He canters along on his horse, the Boers respectfully taking off their hats. His head—to make up for the rest—expresses command; he is

## INCONGRUITIES OF LIFE

a soldier who sees clearly and appears sure of himself. That is a change from the numbers of chiefs who tremble because of their responsibility at the grand manoeuvres.

On a kopje we again met Mrs. Kolbe and her sister, Miss Pretorius, who came with their mother to see the English tents. They kindly shared their provisions with us. Miss Pretorius was dressed in the most becoming fashion : a white sailor hat, a dress with small white and blue stripes, and a white surah blouse under a jacket made of the same material as the skirt.

What is curious in our lives is the mixture of the remains of our civilisation with the barbarities of our new existence. Sternberg, for example, smokes cigars at five shillings each, and goes for three days without washing himself, or taking off his boots to sleep. Extra-dry champagne was his usual drink, but he is satisfied now with whisky and a piece of boiled beef. We uncork old French

## WAR NOTES

wine, champagne, and first-class brandy for our guests with hands which have just scraped carrots or peeled onions. I must say that our menus, consisting of a meat and a vegetable, are, through habit, fairly orderly. Thus, we have boiled-beef and tomato-sauce, roasted leg of mutton and kidney-beans, beef-steak and chipped potatoes, and eggs (when there are any) before meat. Léon and I share the work. As a rule, each makes his own dish, and on the whole, we live well. As to getting the blacks merely to light a fire and boil some water, you succeed the day you give them a beating, but the next day, quite tired out, you do everything yourself. The race is certainly beneath contempt. Exercise yourself with a Kaffir for a month, and you will be proof against impatience for the whole of your life!

The conversation in the evening turned on Magersfontein. It appears the lines

## MAGERSFONTEIN

mingled almost every moment. The Black Watch marched with its usual heroism, and arrived within twenty yards of the Boers. These were obliged to die on their positions rather than lose them, General Cronje having taken the precaution to remove the horses one hour's journey from the battlefield. He has maintained this plan in the case of the trenches: the men are too far from their horses to have recourse to them.

Boer firmness is mingled with so much prudence, the mobility of the mounted infantry and the sequence of kopjes seems so opposed to a stoical retention of positions that there is nothing surprising in this measure which experience suggested to Cronje.

There is one great factor in this extraordinary war—the power of moving about which the Boers, owing to their horses and waggons, possess in a marked degree; whereas the English can only follow the railway which revictuals them, for they have not sufficient bullock-waggons, and

## WAR NOTES

their infantry is not in a condition to make ordinary marches in a country where marching is fatiguing. That explains the inferiority of the regulars, who are baffled in their calculations by the rapidity of the Boers. Nevertheless, it is an astonishing thing that their tactics force the Boers to regular warfare, in the sense that they make use of positions as a European army would, and hardly employ guerilla methods as one would expect. On the other hand, everything in their manner is boundless, and no distance to be covered or the fact that they have a small force stops them. Edified by the enforced immobility of their adversaries, the Boers, lazy by nature, stick to their trenches on guard, and almost totally neglect to make reconnaissances. There are a few men, it is true, who, on their own account, make raids on the herds when they approach the English lines; but they are much more engrossed with the plunder than with the enemy's



## BRITISH SLOWNESS

movements. The English, however, are so sluggish that we almost despair of seeing them wake up somewhere. January is over; Lord Roberts has been here for three weeks, and he has not yet given any visible sign of having assumed the chief command. True, he found troops demoralised and staffs discredited — a melancholy beginning; but from his concentration ought now to appear an indication of his plan, and nothing is very clear yet. The Colesberg-Bloemfontein direction, however, is so imperative that sooner or later he will risk a movement which would perhaps have already been accomplished by the English had they commenced with it.

*January 30.* — Change of camp. We took leave of General Cronje to go to General du Toit's, at the Kimberley water-works. The road was fatiguing both for our horses and ourselves. On arriving we were invited to a delightful camp in a

## WAR NOTES

garden among the trees—rather drooping because no longer watered, but still giving an appreciable shade—and opposite the big dam full of clear water. We were given a charming welcome.

*January 31.*—Visit on foot to Kampfersdam. No way of resting our horses. Mine drags one of its hind legs along in a sad way, and has so lost flesh as to be unrecognisable.

The placing in position of the Long Tom ought to have a great effect. And this will be a good thing, for the Boers appear to me to be terribly afraid of everything which explodes. They were saying yesterday that the ways leading to Kimberley are mined with dynamite. At the announcement yesterday that the English were firing, I was almost knocked down in their rush to shelter, although they were already behind the cone of the mine and in a building. To ask them to

## BOER CHARACTERISTICS

make an attack, or take even the small risks of a night engagement seems to me more and more impossible. The fact of the matter is, there are brave men among the Boers, and it is always these who get killed; but the majority would be cowardly in the presence of the certainty of running a mortal danger without parapets, kopjes, and other intermediary protections. Take away their horses and their kopjes, and the Boers would be ordinary men. The climate here limits activity: one has to make a greater effort than in Europe to produce an identical result. Walking is painful, the legs become weak; physical labour cannot be continued without great determination. One cannot deny that there is physical depression. As a result, the Boer, when he has made an effort, rests himself; oscillates during the whole of his life between somewhat exhausting journeys and repose, seated or lying down, his mind, as composed as his body, lazily

## WAR NOTES

fixed on the same idea. Physical labour, therefore, is accomplished automatically around them. The blacks lead the cattle to the fields and bring them in; they sow the maize and gather it. Scarcely a few listless orders express the master's wish.

His fare is wholesome and uniform. It consists of beef, boiled, or roasted in a saucepan, but always left to cook for a long time; a dish of rice, and another of potatoes and carrots; everything being very tasty. The Boer will never eat chipped potatoes because he would have to hold the frying-pan and turn them over, which would cause fatigue and necessitate a decision as to whether they were sufficiently cooked or not.

He dresses himself, without any attempt at elegance, in a loose-fitting, ready-made suit, his baggy trousers supported by braces. Any kind of boots and a coloured shirt complete a costume the characteristic

## BOER CHARACTERISTICS

of which, new or old, is that it appears to be always dirty. He sleeps in his trousers and braces, because he can thus be more quickly dressed and with less effort.

The Boer uses natural products without preparing them in the least. Fruit he eats raw or, if he wishes to preserve it, dries it in the sun. The preserved fruit and jam made at the Cape and in Natal are such a conglomeration of fruits mixed with moist sugar and honey that they remind you of some pharmaceutical mixture. Everything grows in the gardens, but, as the Boer does not attend to them, everything is only so-so. Artichokes are fibrous, peas coarse, spinage yellow, and turnips woody. Of course everything would be all right with attention, but the European gardener cannot work as in Europe, and must rely on the blacks. I have already given some idea of the value of the nigger. The Boer grows just what he

## WAR NOTES

requires for his own use. He drinks new or curdled milk, eats his meat fresh or smoked, makes his own bread, his fritters, and his pancakes, and gathers the produce of his garden ripe or unripe.

The Boer is happy in his idleness provided he has his coffee, a pipe, and tobacco which grows on his own land. He remains at home, seated or squatted down, with his eye on the road, looking out for the traveller with whom he can have a chat, leaving everything to his wife, whose quicker brain often thinks instead of his. Time does not exist, however, in this free life, subordinated to personal convenience only, any more than the stimulus to seize an opportunity about to slip away. In coming to a decision the Boer delays indefinitely. Supposing he is going hunting, he takes his time; half the day has slipped away in chattering before he has set off, and when finally he leaves it is

## BOER CHARACTERISTICS

only when forced by urgent necessity. Hunting is to him more of a sacrifice than a sport. What the Boers love are their herds. They envelop them with a caressing look; when brought from the pasture lands in the evening, they count them at a glance, recognise them without ever making a mistake. It is their fortune, which prospers and grows without giving them any trouble, or occasioning those great migrations which they love, when, respecting their laziness and making a change in the monotony of their lives, the waggon becomes a moving home.

I know not whether the sons of the Boers will acquire a taste for our scientific and scribbling pretensions; but in that case they will no longer be Boers. The characteristic of the contemplative being—buried in himself, simple and honest in things he can understand—is to reject the complicated and troublesome unnecessaries of which our lives are made up. Peace-

## WAR NOTES

able and familiar habits—the uncontested empire of the mother—give way before the cares and worries with which we gratuitously fill our lives. Family bonds are then broken owing to diversity of disposition and habits. Should civilisation pounce upon this expansive country, it will do its work as elsewhere; it will ravage it in its faith and in its practices; it will take all it can give, and, in return, will leave the disenchantment of successful nations.

What impresses the Burgher most of all is the fact that he is sovereignly free, and that neither his neighbour nor his Government restrains him. He is free, undoubtedly, but only on condition that he behaves as a Burgher should, as his neighbour does, and as his religious and political law has ordered. He is free on condition he lives honestly, piously, in continual contact with his pastor, and without ever casting a covetous eye on his



## BOER CHARACTERISTICS

neighbour's wife. He is free on condition he has nothing to do with strong liquors, drinking - bars, disputes and fights. Ask many civilised men if they would exchange *their* liberty for that of the Boers. The worst moral constraint for a man who had tasted forbidden pleasures would be to comply hypocritically with the life of the Boer.

The most terrible oppression might result from a simple *passion du cœur* in this country, which is exempt from love affairs, or, at least, which authorises them only under legitimate conditions. The Boer, therefore, is free in his own way; he is not from another point of view. When he becomes so he will cease to be free in the primitive manner. That is to say, human bondage is overtaking man here whatever way he turns.

*February 1.*—I took a walk this morning, my eyes fixed on Kimberley, counting its mines, which, transformed into artificial

## WAR NOTES

kopjes, form a grey denticulation to the ridge of ground supporting the town. I was especially interested in two mines on the north and south, the possession of which ought to enable us to invest the depressed town still more closely. Such sights, around which the imagination plays in view of an attack, become passionately interesting. I am sure if the Boers follow my advice the fate of Kimberley is in their hands. Léon, who will translate my opinions to the Council of War, entirely agrees with me as to how to conduct the attack, which will have an additional chance of succeeding owing to the arrival of the French officers with the Long Tom. I count on marching with them as an example, History to add a fresh flower here to the renown of France. To take Kimberley and see the countenance of the "Napoleon of the Cape," mystified by these Boers whom he thought to demolish at a mouthful, would be an unaccustomed

## A PLAN OF ATTACK

pleasure. I await Saturday, therefore, with impatience, and this sight of Kimberley at rest irresistibly attracted me.

I made a reconnaissance with General du Toit, who has accepted my ideas as to a double attack with his troops, one from Kampfersdam, the other from a point in his trenches opposite, whilst General Kolbe is advancing his men opposite the English fort and establishing his cannon there. This movement will be made after the cannonade with the Long Tom. The officers and I will lead the column to Kampfersdam. We shall sleep on the conquered positions. At dawn next day, whilst the Long Tom is bombarding the town, we shall again advance. This attack will be preceded, on the previous day or in the morning, by a demonstration on the mine due north, which marks out the English right towards the west.

In vain we await Sternberg, detained by Cronje, who claims he has a right to the

## WAR NOTES

cannon prior to Kimberley, because Lord Roberts has arrived at the Modder. Pshaw!

*February 2.*—Léon and I have reconnoitred the mine selected for the false attack. We advanced imprudently to the English advance guard, and were pursued by their horsemen, who were fired upon by the Boers. All ended well. We spent the afternoon with Mrs. Kolbe, Miss Pretorius, and the wife of a Protestant preacher, a lady thoroughly Boer at heart and very interesting. We gave a tea to them and the generals. Light toilettes and pretty faces made a ray of sunshine which contrasted deliciously with our tattered uniforms.

*February 3.* — *A propos* of a cannon. General Cronje, who has been sending despatch after despatch for the past three days in order to get the Long Tom taken to his right on the Modder River, has just taken the most decisive step. A despatch-

## ABOUT A "LONG TOM"

rider has gone to meet the gun with an order to change its route.

We had a Council of War this morning, and it seemed favourable to my plan of attack.

Léon has sent a despatch to General Joubert, declining all responsibility in the installation on Cronje's position ; but, with such a chief command as we have here, the gun will remain there to be useless or captured, if it has really been forwarded. It is only a matter of one piece ; but, when there are only four of its kind, when the armament of the Pretoria forts depends on them, and when they are regarded with great superstition by the combatants, one should at least know they must only be exposed knowingly.

General Cronje's idea is to be as strong as possible when he is attacked. But his suppositions on the coming of this attack are very vague. Had the plan of attack on Kimberley been put into execution on Monday, the town would have been in our

## WAR NOTES

hands on Tuesday, and 4000 Boers, free for another operation, would have been at Cronje's orders if it had been shown the men were wanted.

It was only a false rumour! The Long Tom is coming *via* Boshof, and cannot be turned from its route; it is only late and will be here on Monday. Léon explained our little plan to the Council of War this morning, and it had the good fortune to be adopted unanimously. All the Burghers' positions will be drawn closer, and when we have marched, with General du Toit, he will be obliged to follow in our steps. I am pleased to afford this début to the recently arrived French officers. If the operation succeeds—as I am sure it will—French guns and French gallantry will have won the day. The rule here must be not to hurry matters or to affright a natural prudence which requires assurances before undertaking anything.

## BOER PLANS

If we succeed, the English army will again attack the Modder River, and will withdraw definitely in case of failure. Should it attack at the same time as we do here, and suffer its usual fate, it will be so much more gained in rapidity. The Boer plan—and it is beginning to be put into execution—is to join their brothers of the Cape by outflanking the British forces. Two hundred Boers with two guns and ammunition have already gone westward to join the Boers of Prieska, who, armed but without cartridges, have called for aid. This movement, generalised, may lead to a rising in Cape Colony which will be the end of the English. But, whatever they may do in the future, there is now peace at Capetown, and, as President Steyn well said at Ladysmith, it is all or nothing,—a question of taking back the entire Empire of South Africa and finishing with Albion's arrogance and duplicity.

It was 119° in the shade to-day.

## WAR NOTES

*February 4.*—Sunday: a rest day. Very hot.

*February 5.*—Awaiting the cannon with feverish expectation. Sternberg arrived at noon with a private secretary of General Cronje. We mounted our horses at four o'clock to ride to meet the Long Tom. No news of it ten miles away! Information as to the many routes it might take was discouraging. We returned at night-fall. Our dinner for the French officers was utterly wasted. Nothing arrived during the night. This gun is becoming a myth, unless it has entered Kimberley with its ammunition and escort.

*February 6.*—The French officers escorting the Long Tom have arrived at last. They brought me letters of recommendation, but, in default of anything else, news from France. Léon is going to settle the question of the gun. We have had a conversation with the landrosts, Generals



## "LONG TOM" IN POSITION

du Toit and Kolbe. We made arrangements for the dinner and the lodging of our guests. With Sternberg's provisions and those of Cronje's secretary we are set up like a hotel.

We went with Sternberg to-night to see the placing of the Long Tom at Kampfersdam. Under a romantic sky, from which at times large drops of rain fell, that mass of men, oxen and horses, halting, lying down, or in movement behind the mine, was full of interest. They were at work on the platform. The Boers, loaded with rough stone, moved here and there in silence. The ascent and the *terre-plein* were carefully hidden and protected. The movement had not been observed, in spite of the English search-lights. Crouched on sacks of earth on the parapet, we questioned the luminous rays, seeking to divine their object.

Movements of Boer troops bringing their positions closer together at various

## WAR NOTES

points took place. Everything, however, was silent, and the enemy seemed to be asleep as usual. Only their two great luminous eyes eagerly searched the plain. When we were returning, the brilliant rays fell upon us, and drove us nearly wild by dint of persistence.

*February 7.*—The Long Tom opened fire at eleven o'clock. I came away, and superintended the meal for the guests who were still at the mine. There was a long string of Kaffirs this morning opposite the position, advancing and stopping—a white flag at their head. They were a curious sight, these hungry men and women, with their sunshades and parasols and, on their grotesque bodies, borrowed clothes, embellished with tinsel.

Firing stopped in the afternoon, the *terre-plein* becoming rather disjointed

*February 8.*—The platform was repaired

## STORY OF A FAILURE

this morning. The gun did good work in the afternoon, more particularly in blowing up a magazine.

Sternberg returns to the Modder River. The laagers have had to send troopers to recapture a hill at Coudesberg, which is occupied by 500 English who, at a distance of three hours' journey, threaten to outflank Cronje's right.

*February 9.*—Kimberley.

Between decision and action! What follows may be styled the history of a failure.

A superb plan had been concocted in view of the coming of the Long Tom. This cannon, recovered from the effects of English gun-cotton, entered on the scene again like a miracle. We centred many, many hopes on it. It was to take train at a fixed hour, like a living person, with its accompaniment of ammunition; surrounded by a picked squad of men, in

## WAR NOTES

addition to an escort of French officers recently landed, it was to find its relays of oxen placed at intervals along its route, thanks to the activity of the landrosts.

Its bad luck began, unfortunately, at the outset, as in the case of those people who do not know what good luck is. First of all, its gunners were not at the station to meet it. They had remained in the arms of their wives, forgetful of the early morning departure. Then, when *en route* — embraces over at last—it was found that some articles of its travelling-bag were missing. Finally, at Brandfort, it started on its journey with that Boer philosophy for which it was not made, but which climate and circumstances communicate to chance-comers here.

As it did not travel much during the day and rested at night, it had every opportunity for comparing the sandy steppe upon which it ventured with the rocky kopjes where it had sniffed the breezes of

## STORY OF A FAILURE

Natal. This was not an exhausting life for the oxen, which were forgotten in the pastures. The Boers turned this to their advantage by visiting the occupants of farms passed here and there at watering-places. Everything was prospering, therefore, with the caravan, which—when, perchance, it moved—advanced sprightly and well-filled, its progress harmonised by the quartermaster.

This man was a musical maniac. He was either bringing forth excruciating sounds with a trumpet, or moans from a Kaffir flageolet. If he gave up, he riddled the indestructible ant-hills with revolver bullets. But, in whatever way he occupied his activity, he amused the convoy, the slowness of which, however, had no need of being increased. Timed to arrive on Friday, it did not appear until Tuesday night, when we had given up expecting it.

Léon's activity fell like a spark on these

## WAR NOTES

weak Boer wills—undulating and yielding like those long, green stems which in this country have that inherent slothfulness due to illimitable light and never-ending sunshine. They brightened up at first, but Boer apathy quickly stifled the effort. After a night's feverish activity at the Kampfersdam Mine the workmen, kneeling down, fell asleep on their ashlar; the ground under the *terre-plein* gave way; in the darkness people were at cross-purposes, and work had to be recommenced at daylight. The Long Tom was not ready until about noon, instead of very early in the morning, as everybody expected, and its first few shots were not brilliant. Besides, meal-time and noon-tide nap soon intervened.

In the evening, as the silence continued, we were informed that the platform had slightly given way, and that the squad of workmen had made the occurrence a pretext

## STORY OF A FAILURE

for stopping work. The general followed suit by countermanding the operation. There was great contentment in the laagers at the announcement of this respite from action. The pastors profited by it, and soon the singing of psalms spread about the kopjes. A preacher came as far as Kampfersdam with the Holy Word, and the combatants grouped themselves behind the Long Tom, charmed by the presence of the man of peace.

The English, whose hour it was, and who had been invited to reply by the trials, so modest, however, of the Long Tom, suddenly began a violent and, above all, an accurate fire. At the first shell the preacher scampered down the hill; his audience, moreover, had abandoned him without ceremony to take shelter. They had a number of little shocks—cheerfully overcome—when the first shells passed behind Kampfersdam; but these soon fell nearer and nearer the kopje, and, at last, one of them, passing

## WAR NOTES

with a sinister crash through the scaffolding surmounting it, shook it to its base. After that sand and stone flew about the *terre-plein*, this continuing with a certain briskness until the Boer artillerymen, forgetting their objections against the platform, commenced to reply no less vivaciously to the fire which beat them in front. There was a useless waste of ammunition on both sides; but, as this resultless firing at isolated guns appeared to be of some value, the respective combatants ate their dinners with feelings of satisfaction.

On the morning of the next day, February 8th, the platform, the screen, and the course were systematically strengthened, the scaffolding was pulled down, a shelter for projectiles was made, and, in the afternoon, the Long Tom—firmly established—continued its learned discourse. It was even so eloquent, after addressing the town, that it fired a magazine, which ex-



## STORY OF A FAILURE

ploded amidst clouds of dark smoke. This was the time to carry out the plan of attack upon Ottoskopje decided upon by the Council of War. The Long Tom had done its work; the rifle might now have entered upon the scene. But the Boer generals, who are not endowed with a genius for war, let the opportunity slip. Their prudence caused all sorts of delays. They talked about nothing and put things off until the next day. General Ferreira, however, visited the camps. Probably he was told of the good service done by the Long Tom, and it was considered that, having begun so well, it had better continue.

On the 9th, without any other delay than that necessary to scale the gun, it was made to speak at long range with all the force of its lungs. The shells passed over the amphitheatre of the town, bursting majestically just in the right places, and even falling amongst the herds as they returned from the pastures. In short,

## WAR NOTES

it did excellent work. But the command was showing unusual activity that day! A hundred horsemen had been detached from the laagers to go to a distance on special service. The generals spoke of this with great emphasis, as though the camps had suddenly emptied, whereas they were resounding with the same liturgical chants, the same kitchen fires were smoking, and they were buzzing with the same peaceful animation as before. Then it was whispered, mysteriously, that these troopers were about to return, and that perhaps to-morrow — Ah! yes; here it is always a question of to-morrow: that inexorable rule of wait, wait, wait which makes Europeans chafe with impatience. To-morrow, however, never comes. It needs a certain Transvaal experience to treat those occasions with unconcern.

In this particular instance, however, to-morrow coincided with the event through the action of the English. The command

## STORY OF A FAILURE

had remembered everything but them. They peppered our laager with their big gun so as to divert the fire of the Long Tom, which was incommoding the town too much. Crack shots sheltered behind trenches, which had been made during the night on the plain, poured an embarrassing shower of bullets on our gunners. The poor Long Tom—the trusty animal from Creusot—will have done all that can be expected of it, it will have barked vigorously and bitten deeply; but, acting without the concurrence of leaders who have not its intelligence, its appearance here will be short.

The gun fires continuously on the town and produces great effects. Still the Boer generals refuse to march. It is an opportunity undoubtedly lost through their heedlessness. The English bombard our laager, causing the flight of a pastor.

*February 10.*—The English continue to

## WAR NOTES

bombard our camp. They are trying to divert the fire of the Long Tom by means of infantry trenches on the plain between Ottoskopje and the gun Cecil, which, at 1600 yards, pours a very embarrassing fire on our gunners. Evidently they wish to make an end of our cannon. General du Toit remains undiscoverable. These Boer generals, when they do not possess military instinct, are really most curious; their attention recoils before events just as their instinct of preservation makes them avoid a cannon-ball. When I asked him yesterday what his plans for action were, he replied that he had an appointment to-day with a commander at Kampfersdam. They are always having to deliberate with a neighbour, and it is ever the neighbour who refuses to march. I consider, therefore, that my plan is ruined, notwithstanding a telegram from Bilse, General Ferreira's adjutant, asking me to defer my departure, and, on behalf of General Kolbe, promising

## "LONG TOM'S" EFFECTS

me men for Monday evening. I shall leave on Tuesday, for these men will not be forthcoming.

I spent the day with the Long Tom. A few bullets whistled about. Firing on the town during the day was good. It was resumed at nine and stopped at midnight, because of Sunday—one shot being fired every six minutes. General du Toit, who gives the most of his time, appeared on the scene. According to news from Kimberley, the fire on the town is causing great alarm among the population, which has suffered serious losses. This betokens that resistance will not now be very prolonged. The Boers ought, therefore, to hasten the denouement; but I am afraid it will be too late.

*February 11.*—Sunday : a rest day.

*February 12.* To-day the English fired on our laager, the shells falling perpen-

## WAR NOTES

dicularly. Very few Boers remained, as they were behind their trenches, which they made in spite of respect for Sunday.

After sending our horses to graze, as they were too exposed to the fire, I walked to Kampfersdam.

Our young Frenchmen went to see the firing in the trenches and quite forgot their horses. Léon preceded me to the Long Tom on horseback. I found him there in high spirits. The English fusilade was so hot that, when I was starting, I told my compatriots they had better take their rifles. Apart from the gunners, the only persons present were General du Toit, Léon, and myself. A good few bullets came very close to us. A gill mug, for instance, which I had just put down on the sacks of earth after taking a drink, was shattered. Venture your head a little outside the embankment, and you were immediately greeted by a volley of bullets which, on the right, were flattened on the

## LÉON SHOT

wood and iron of the fallen scaffolding, and, on the left, gave forth a uniform whistle before sweeping the kopje's rear. The cannon obstinately fired on the suburbs of Kimberley for the benefit of the inhabitants who had taken refuge there.

At a certain moment it caused a violent outbreak of fire. Léon said to me: "When, in three days time, I have received incendiary shells, a fire will break out at every successful shot."

He was returning from looking over the parapet to the right to see the effects of the shot, whilst I was returning from the left. We were walking towards each other and about to meet, when suddenly I saw him stagger, spin round, and fall on his back against the Long Tom. I ran forward and supported his back. He vomited a great quantity of blood. Everything happened without a word; nobody had seen him fall, and I had to call the gunners to my assistance. We carried him into the

## WAR NOTES

magazine. Then I telegraphed to the doctor at the hospital of our laager (two hours' journey away), and ordered the boy who was holding Léon's horse to gallop to our camp and fetch the physician in charge of the ambulance. Meanwhile, I supported the poor fellow, who was covered with blood, pressing his hands, and moved to tears at the parting farewells which he addressed to all of us. The blood prevented me from judging of the condition of the wound; all I could see was an opening. The bullet appeared to have passed downwards and lodged in the opposite side of his throat, for he complained of great pain there.

His voice was the same; his mind clear; his pulse variable, but rather calm. However, the frequency with which he said he was dying, the yellowness which overspread his features, and certain nervous spasms, plunged me into the deepest anguish.

The fate of this remarkably energetic



## HIS CHARACTERISTICS

and intelligent young man, who, after having unsuccessfully exercised his inventive faculties at Lorenzo Marquez and at Johannesburg, had made fortune smile upon him, deeply affected me. He was not here as a combatant, and yet he acted as the most active and most useful of all combatants.

So as not to alarm his mother, he concealed from her the fact that he was at the front, and sent his letters to Pretoria, whence they were redirected to her. He was affectionate and attentive to me to excess ; clever ; easy to live with ; a sympathetic talker, full of tact, and possessed right and noble views on things. He was, above all, passionately French, and his efforts here to attract the commerce and industry of our country—although he was unable to overcome Boer routine—alone deserve the gratitude of all who desire to see France ever greater and more radiant. Léon's work in the defence of the Transvaal will have been consider-

## WAR NOTES

able. The English bullet which struck him went straight to its mark.

The doctor quickly arrived ; but waiting seemed interminable. Léon was carried behind the mine on a stretcher. It was then found, to the best of the doctor's belief, that the bullet had passed through the forehead above the temple, without touching the brain. The wounded man was then carried to General du Toit's laager, where was Dr. Dunlop of the hospital. It appears from his examination that the wound is very serious, the bullet having injured the brain and fractured the frontal bone. An operation will have to be performed, but this can only be done at the hospital, and I am awaiting his departure. I have telegraphed the sad news to Presidents Kruger and Steyn, as well as to General Joubert and Grünberg.

I have asked General du Toit to telegraph to General Kolbe, telling him that if his offer of fifty Boers to attempt a *coup*

## SAVED

*de main* on Ottoskopje still holds good, he can send them to Kampfersdam at six o'clock to-night. Although the attack is six days too late and under much less favourable conditions, I am determined to attempt it.

*February 13.* — Shells continued to fall on our camp, and disturbed the luncheon of two guests. The platform of the Long Tom is still as inhospitable as ever. This afternoon a telegram from Léon summoned me to his side at Riverton. I arrived at nightfall, and found him still under chloroform. The operation lasted until after eleven o'clock.

*February 14.* — Had a talk to-day with Léon, who is perfectly lucid and has no signs of fever. The doctor says he is saved, and even that he will not lose his eye. Leaving Courtenay, d'Etchegoyen, and Michel at Riverton, where they had

## WAR NOTES

slept, on it being rumoured that Kertanguy and two other comrades had passed with a waggon, I returned. Whilst preparing my waggon with Coste (whom I have retained, in addition to Bréda), M. Boscher and another of our compatriots arrived, just in time for me to say farewell to them.

The journey as far as Kolbe's laager was made in a terrible storm. We were drenched to the skin. The night was very stormy.

*February 15.*—I left alone on account of a lost horse. Consequently the waggon will only overtake me at Scotchfarm, with a deficit of two blacks—one remaining to look for the horse, which has been found again, and the other stopping to bring it back.

Admirably received at Scotchfarm by the real owners, and at the Dutch ambulance by the doctors and nurses, I recommended Bréda to them. Leaving him with the

## KIMBERLEY RELIEVED

waggon, I set off again with Coste. On arriving at the telegraph, I learnt that the Hoofdlaager had changed its position, that the English had been attacking for three days past, had crossed the Modder, and were threatening Kimberley. I hurried forward, and, on reaching the camp, received confirmation of this bad news, which they still more aggravated. I felt anxious about my waggon, so set off with two of the General's secretaries, Coste, and M. Lefranc, a retired officer, to discover the true state of affairs. The two secretaries made me lose a lot of time with their precautions, for the Boers know how to beat about the bush. I believe the English have an advance-guard on the two banks of the Modder. That did not appear to me sufficiently serious to prevent me summoning the waggon. I imagine, since the English evidently intend to get to Kimberley, that the troops of the Hoofdlaager will be withdrawn in echelon behind

## WAR NOTES

the Kimberley route to a fine position which commands the ground. Above all, the entire left of the line of defence must be evacuated in accordance with a plan which I am drawing up, for it is out-flanked in such a manner as to present its positions in echelon.

In my first conversation with General Cronje, I pointed out to him the danger his left was running. But he would not admit it, making out that a *coup de main* by a small English corps would result in its capture, and that a large force would never leave the railway. He considered, on the other hand, that his right was in peril, and he wished to place the Long Tom there to fire upon an armoured train, the danger of which his imagination exaggerated, at the same time as the employment of this gun.

The disposition at an acute angle of his line, and the direction of the English camp at Jacobsdal, was however sufficiently

## KIMBERLEY RELIEVED

suggestive. When the English commenced their outflanking movement at Colesberg, towards our right, they were checked. As soon as they returned to our left, getting on the right track, their operation was a complete success. I cannot believe, however, that the Kimberley route will be relinquished without a struggle, so I sent Coste to Scotchfarm with an order to bring the waggon the next morning.

On reaching the new Hoofdlaager, I found everybody very alarmed. The position was felt to be bad, and that of the laager in particular—two miles away from the old site—was worthless.

Sternberg, very excited, returned from Joubert's farm, relating that all the Boers had run like rabbits at the first shell, and that the English were already at Alexanderfontein, in sight of Kimberley. He was leaving for Jacobsdal with his waggon, hoping to pass between the sections of the English army when the outflanking move-

## WAR NOTES

ment was in proximity to Koffiefontein, south of Jacobsdal, on the Colesberg road. He was there in person, drank two bottles of beer amidst the shells, and even conversed with an English colonel, who affirmed Bloemfontein would be captured in a week. He only left the town at full gallop at the moment a battalion entered the marketplace and sent him a shower of bullets.

I saw him again in the evening at the laager, furious against the Boers since hearing they are retreating without showing fight. At first sight this resolution seemed inexplicable, and pointed to Cronje having lost his head. But it is the result of a series of errors arising from that absence of foresight which is the characteristic of the Boer command. Was the General in a position to fight when he took over the leadership? I do not think so. He had so split up his men into small bodies, according as he received news of the enemy's movements, that all he had left



## KIMBERLEY RELIEVED

was a disorganised force, in which the commandos were mixed up, the leaders separated from their men, and their disbanding imminent. Apart from a big detachment which operated between Jacobsdal and Koffiefontein, there were small reinforcements everywhere—among other points along the Modder—the men smoking in the shade, and completely useless since the line was forced.

I accepted an invitation to dine with Sternberg, whose quarters were still on the Modder, beyond the old camp. He was glad to remain there the last, when the Boers had fled. Not far from him were the war correspondents, who proposed to sleep there, although Sternberg saw that we only had the night in which to leave what was henceforward within the English zone.

He offered first of all to go with me to Scotchfarm, and then to Boshof; but changed his mind, saying he wished to

## WAR NOTES

proceed to Olifantsfontein and the Bloemfontein road. It meant grazing the English advance-guard — a dangerous, but still possible endeavour. My plan had no chance of success unless our troops were still around Kimberley. I believed they were, so left Sternberg for Scotchfarm. The moon was shining, and I could see the road distinctly. Yet, unfortunately, or rather fortunately, I took the wrong road, on the advice of Léon's Kaffir—a road leading to the laagers on our right—and only discovered my error on seeing the chain of Schotnek. I was going to skirt it when I came on a laager which was preparing for departure. Insufficiently recognised at first, I had to wait for the commander, who was absent.

He confirmed the impossibility of reaching Scotchfarm, some parts of the road being already in the hands of the English, and advised me to retreat with his laager. After a fairly long time, the column set

## BOERS IN RETREAT

off, the men on foot, owing to their being unable to fetch their horses from the pasturage in time. It was the Belmont commando, and this piece of negligence shows well to what a pitch of military disorganisation the Boers had got.

At the beginning of the march there was some supervision, halts were made at the blowing of a whistle, and the men kept together; but, when part of the troops had been rejoined by their horses, they dashed away and were so scattered over the expansive gray steppe, silvered by the moon, that at times one might have thought oneself alone. After following me first of all, my black attendant abandoned me to sleep at random on the plain, with the bridle in his hands. Deprivation of sleep made my brain heavy, and I had strange hallucinations. Sometimes the waggons in the distance seemed to be houses surrounded by trees; sometimes an arch of zinc, the roof of which was so low

## WAR NOTES

that it made me fear for my head, appeared to separate the earth and the sky. Finding in my pocket an apple given me at the laager, and which I had forgotten, I ate it to slake my thirst, for I was somewhat feverish. Later on, I discovered a drop of brandy in my flask and drank it, sucking at the bottle for a long time so as to lose nothing.

At a crossing of tracks near a house we passed other columns. Parallel lines of waggons then moved across the plain, the vehicles mingling, and the quicker ousting the slower; the men, on horseback or on foot, moved heedlessly along or slept peaceably at the bottom of their waggons. The disorder, nevertheless, was comparatively calm. Apart from the shouts of the boys to urge on their oxen, and the cracking of whips, there was no human clamour, nor oath, nor cry of anger. The heedlessness or military ignorance of this retreating band, which was opening the

## BOERS IN RETREAT

Free State to the English, was even quite cheerful. The Boers had no need to tell me in words the retreat had their general assent. These Free State comandos of Cronje's army, whose value I had so many times heard decried, truly merited their reputation.

*February 16.*—At daybreak I found Mr. Jorissen, one of General Cronje's secretaries, awaiting the General opposite a pretty house on the Boshof road, and near the place chosen for the camp. The waggons could be seen in the distance arranging themselves. I stopped to talk to him, and, as two blacks were selling fodder, hastened to buy two bundles for my horse, placed under a tree. The General's secretary confirmed the evacuation on the previous day of the Kimberley camps, and gave me hope that my waggon had retreated with Kolbe's troops.

After watering our horses, we decided

## WAR NOTES

to travel together to Petrusburg, which was not so far as Boshof and on the Bloemfontein road. Possessing nothing, I could not remain at the camp, and I did not wish to be cut off from Colesberg, where Sauer was stationed with the other waggon. Instead of the fighting in search of which I had come to the Modder, I had found only deplorable weakness in the command, and a vexatious jumble of contingents, too unequal in strength, amongst which the Free State did not play the best part.

If my plans had failed owing to that tenaciousness for inaction in which the Boers excel, my views had been cruelly justified also, since, through doing nothing, we had thrust ourselves into that disastrous situation which was evident to me at the first sight of the Modder and Kimberley positions. The only thing which exceeded my anticipations was Cronje giving way without fighting, thereby only aggravating the situation, since

## BOERS IN RETREAT

it was a supreme avowal of absolute disorganisation.

After covering a fairly great distance, drawing nearer to the Modder, whither the heads of the convoys instinctively bent their steps, we pushed forward to the water's edge, whilst the artillery of the English cavalry opened fire, though fortunately at a great distance, on our waggons. Since the first gleam of dawn it had entered into contact with its battery. Marching then became better, the animals pushed on, and the kopjes, immediately ahead, were covered little by little with Boers, at the same time that others deployed towards the Modder. Whence came orders? Things seemed to be done by instinct.

I had luncheon at the General's kitchen with his staff, whilst he and his wife ate on a packing-case. The coffee was sugarless; there was a little stewed pork; and one had some difficulty in reaching

## WAR NOTES

the water in the pail placed near Mrs. Cronje. Her head was covered with a silk handkerchief under her hat. She unpacked her case with the aid of a black dwarf, who, little by little, carried his luncheon under the General's carriage, where, in a colonial helmet into which he introduced his shoulders in addition to his head, he had established his headquarters.

I was leaving with Mr. Jorissen after this summary luncheon, when, to my great surprise, I saw Coste coming towards me. He had been prevented by the Boers from reaching Scotchfarm, owing to the insecurity of the road; had returned to the Hooflaager when it was just setting off; and since his arrival at the new camp, had had to mount guard on a kopje. I told him of my intention to go to Petrusburg for a rest, and asked him to join me there the next evening, with or without the waggon. I was relying then



## A RIDE TO PETRUSBURG

on the information, which Boers seem to delight in giving incorrectly, that Petrusburg was only four hours' journey from the camp. We shall see how inexecutable my order was!

Setting off at about nine o'clock—one hour after getting out of the saddle—we rode fairly vigorously, notwithstanding a broiling sun and getting on a wrong track, towards the Modder. We crossed at a so-called drift, and following the information of passers-by, pushed on down a path which led us to recross the river and enter on a well-beaten track in quite an opposite direction. It seemed as though we were turning in a circle. Kaffirs affirmed, however, that we were on the Bloemfontein road. Anxious as to our direction, I constantly kept on the lookout for information; but, save for the cattle, the enormous plain was empty. At last we saw a farm, but to reach it had to

## WAR NOTES

cross the Modder again. It was occupied by a detachment of Boers, who guaranteed the Kaffirs' directions. Whilst there we gave a feed to the horses, who had great need of it; and, feeling feverish, I had a deep draught of water. We then recrossed the river, convinced that we were going towards Bloemfontein, and also that we were not on the Petrusburg road, of the existence of which no one seemed to be aware.

The path ought to have led us from the Modder to the well-beaten track, which had appeared to us to run parallel to the river. But we could no longer find it, and, finally, we struck a large farm where several waggons were encamped. Some Boers, who knew me, received us with their customary hospitality, gave us new milk and water, and fodder to our horses. I slept for ten minutes with my head on my saddle. It was four o'clock when we set off again, this time well informed

## A RIDE TO PETRUSBURG

about Petrusburg. It appeared we were again *en route* there, and only two hours' journey away. Those two hours seemed eternal. At six o'clock we passed a farm where they stopped us to ask for news. Jorissen could not resist the offer of a drink—a custom very dear to the Boers—and accepted some coffee, which was served to us without sugar. After that we had curds. My stomach had been feeling the effects of fatigue for some time, and this completely turned it. When we remounted into the saddle, night was creeping on the hills before us. I should have preferred, for my part, to have remained at the farm—although small and crowded with a family, under the patriarchal rule of a venerable grandfather. But Jorissen was tempted by the Petrusburg hotel.

Our eyes bent on the track, which was confused in the darkness with the veldt, we pushed forward briskly, overriding our

## WAR NOTES

poor horses. At last the moon appeared. Sometimes in the distant champaign flickered a light, or else lightning flashes behind kopjes made us think we were near the end of our journey. But the more we scaled ridges the more deceptions we had, and, after mentally renouncing dinner, I proceeded to drop all idea of a lodging, deciding that we should end by throwing ourselves on the veldt through sheer exhaustion.

Suddenly, however, a light glimmered in front of us and gave us hope. Alas! it was only a Kaffir fire! They told us, however, that Petrusburg was not far off — only two kopjes distant. But, having swallowed so many kopjes, we could digest no more; so I told the blacks that if they would guide us I would give them two shillings. We were certain then not to lose our way, and it was an assurance we were really not far away. We continued at a walking pace, spurring our horses. We

## A RIDE TO PETRUSBURG

learnt from the driver of a cart, which passed us after reaching the first kopje, that we had yet a distance of six hundred paces. I multiplied that number by eight, trying to get nearer the truth of Boer estimates. At last we reached the second kopje, but it was not until we had far exceeded it that we saw the only light which was still burning in Petrusburg. It was nearly midnight. I had been nearly forty-eight hours in the saddle.

*February 17.* — Good hotel kept by Germans; excellent supper; comfortable bed in which, after seeing to our horses' wants, we slept fraternally. My night's rest was disturbed owing to over-fatigue, and in the morning I slept heavily. On rising, I went to the telegraph office to send a despatch to Boshof, ordering my waggon, if found, to be sent to Bloemfontein. There was no news of it. Coste's arrival seems to me more and more

improbable now that I know the road; he will never find it. As to the waggon—I have long given up expecting it. Despatches really state that General De Wet has captured an English convoy of two hundred waggons.

A commando has passed on its way to occupy Blanhankdrift, on the Riet, from whence the English made their movement. But I am even now within the zone of their operations, since it is said the road is cut between Petrusburg and the Hoofd-laager, and Jorissen has given up the idea of rejoining his general. He has asked me to leave for Bloemfontein this afternoon in company with a Dutch doctor. I think I shall accept; for there are signs of a downfall, and Cronje's corps does not appear to me capable of resisting if the English show determination. In any case, he must already be *en route* for Boshof, so as to break the contact and occupy the important intersection of roads there, even

## TOWARDS BLOEMFONTEIN

though, in his retreat, he should have to abandon part of his waggon.

*February 18.*—We left at four o'clock yesterday afternoon with Dr. Lingbeck and Mr. Wincherlenk, two amiable Dutchmen who speak excellent French, and indeed other languages, for their countrymen are all astonishing polyglots. We slept at a splendid Boer farm. It was after nine o'clock when we arrived. As Jorissen and I followed the doctor's cart on horseback, we made good progress. A dinner of eggs and milk was made for us—a menu which suited my stomach very well. We each had a bed to ourselves, for all the farms are prepared to give liberal hospitality, and this particular one is so well known that it is counted upon like the house of most intimate friends. By no means a banal state of things, as one must admit!

We were *en route* at four o'clock in

## WAR NOTES

the morning, having been awakened by our hosts and served with *café au lait*. What Parisian would rise at three in the morning to prepare breakfast even for his best friend?

We took a longer but better route than the main road, which was much too sandy for the cart. Notwithstanding our horses' fatigue, we travelled at a good speed, stimulated by the cart. My poor horse (Léon's), although a very good animal, had become slow. It was like spurring a block of wood.

We halted at eight o'clock at a second farm, and were given some milk by the occupant. The doctor warmed for us, on a convenient spirit stove, a Dutch tinned food consisting of a mixture of finely chopped vegetables, sausages or game, which is eaten without bread, and forming, in a single box, a perfect food.

Owing to lack of air in the mimosa woods we became greatly fatigued, in



## TOWARDS BLOEMFONTEIN

spite of occasional breezes on the kopjes. We next reached a very sumptuous farm inhabited by an Irishman and his daughter, a very agreeable young lady. After a refreshing wash, we had an excellent dinner (minus maize-bread) of chicken pie, Irish stew, and fresh cream, washed down, as we were all feverishly thirsty, with copious draughts of milk and pure water.

At last, at four o'clock in the afternoon, Bloemfontein appeared in its framework of verdure, and we entered the town at the very moment large drops of rain announced the breaking of the storm which had followed us. We were just in time, for Jorissen and I had no other protection than the clothes on our backs.

*February 19.*—Ascertaining the extent of my damages, I found that my coat was in tatters, my leggings were giving way, the bottom of my sabretasche had a hole in it, and the barrel of my

## WAR NOTES

revolver was protruding from its case. I could neither change my shirt nor brush myself, and for a very good reason—the only thing I possessed was a tooth-brush. Jorissen's sole property was a cake of soap, which I borrowed. But I did not lend him my tooth-brush in return. Through too great a need of rest, we slept uneasily. On the previous day we did nothing but drink, so torturing was our thirst. After purchasing a small dressing-case—the first necessity—I telegraphed to the landrost of Boshof (with whom I had communicated when at Petrusburg) to know if he had news of my waggon, and, in case he had, to ask him to send it here; to Sauer, at Colesberg, to ask if he was still there, and tell him what to bring me; and to Grünberg for news of Léon. I then visited Mr. Fischer, a member of the Executive Council, to place my views on the situation before him.

## INTERVIEW WITH STEYN

He immediately summoned President Steyn—whose tailor, I noticed at once, was not that of his colleague Krüger, upon which I congratulated him *in petto*. I pointed out to him, first in French, which was translated by Jorissen, and then, warming to my subject, in English, that the command of the Free State troops must be placed in the hands of one man; that General Delarey, judging by his services, seemed to me to be the commander needed, and that he must be stationed at Bloemfontein with a reserve capable of acting wherever he was most needed, either towards the Modder or towards the Orange.

I told him that sending commandos to General Cronje was not much good, since he was surrounded; but that they ought to be sent to General De Wet, who was reported to have drawn nearer to the Modder after that brilliant *coup de main* by which he had captured the regimental

## WAR NOTES

train (180 waggons) of the Kimberley outflanking column. I then advised a series of guerilla operations against Kitchener's trains, making it impossible for him to live, without exposing ourselves in attempting to stop his forward movement, the country being unsuitable for such an attempt owing to its too open character. I even offered to draw up a rapid plan for the defence of Bloemfontein; but the President rightly objected that he wished to defend it as far away as possible, in order not to expose it to being taken by assault. He said he would consult the Commission of War about my ideas, and asked me to defer my departure to Colesberg.

Many amiable men at the clubs, and also too many drinks! The afternoon was occupied in looking for my undiscoverable Consul; my guide, in taking me to houses which M. Aubert frequents, making me visit three amiable ladies, with

## BOERS IN A TANGLE

each of whom I had tea. When at table in the evening I received a telegram from the landrost of Boshof announcing that my waggon was found and *en route* for Bloemfontein. I had a glass of brandy with Jorissen to celebrate the event. News still serious, although attenuated. Cronje is surrounded; De Wet has drawn nearer to him and received reinforcements; Ferreira's corps is operating in Cronje's neighbourhood, but poor Ferreira himself has been accidentally killed when awakening a sleeping soldier whose rifle was loaded. Du Toit has removed the Long Tom from Kampfersdam and must be near Riverton; some say Kolbe is with him, others that he has drawn nearer to Boshof.

This is somewhat of an entanglement. One thing only appears to me certain—that Sternberg, with his curious idea of wishing to pass between the enemy's columns, has been captured. God grant that he turns up again like my waggon!

## WAR NOTES

*February 20.*—The situation is still very dubious. Cronje has moved, but the circle is closing around him; since Monday he has been without communication even by despatch riders. The English occupy Koodoos Rand in force, an isolated kopje near the Modder and three hours' journey from Abraham's Kraal, which is six hours' distance from here—three hours according to Boer calculations! De Wet is concentrating his reinforcements, and ought to attack to break the circle; but nothing has been done, and I am sceptical about the Boers attacking.

Operations are directed by a Commission of War, but we know the value of Aulic councils. Du Toit remains encamped east of Kimberley, because he is not attacked, never suspecting for a moment that he is cut off, and ought to reach Boshof at all costs. It is said Kolbe is there. Ferreira's corps ought to be near the English, co-operating with De Wet; but

## BRÉDA'S ESCAPE

nothing definite is to hand about the force.

An idle day of waiting. My horse is lame, making it impossible for me to move even if I knew where to go. The waggon arrived in the evening with Bréda and Mr. Boshier, whom he picked up during the disorder of departure from Kimberley. Kertanguy is lost. The landrost has sent to ask me to certify the identity of M. Guillot, their third companion. He came to me in a most pitiable state, and takes train to-morrow for Pretoria.

Bréda managed his affair very smartly. A few days after our separation he witnessed from a height the entrance of the English into Kimberley — 5000 to 6000 men in very good order. Some Boers passing on their way to Kolbe's laager, he put in the mules and followed them. He retreated with Kolbe's laager in the direction of Du Toit, and afterwards followed both these generals towards the

## WAR NOTES

laager, which can be seen at a distance from the railway on the way to Riverton. There was a fight there, the English having gone that way as well. Bréda then took a short cut with his waggon, amidst the shells, in the direction of Boshof, where he arrived on Saturday evening. On the previous day the land-rost had received my telegram, so he was able to proceed to Bloemfontein. As the Boshof road leads to the Modder, Bréda and Bosher heard the English guns for two days ; but they were not disquieted, they pulled through with their few words of German and English, crossed the Modder, which contained a good deal of water, and brought the waggon and team here safe and sound, although very fatigued.

At the present time there are three Frenchmen at Cronje's camp, including Coste and Léon's boy, with one of his horses. Kertanguy must be in the hands of the English. So is Sternberg, and will



## VOLUNTEERS ARRIVE

be sent to London by the first boat. The others have probably reached Pretoria. Bréda is going there too, for he has already used up three horses.

*February 21.*—The same languid situation as regards operations, notwithstanding Cronje's crisis. I shall leave to-morrow, even without news. Sauer's reply has arrived at last. The heat is insupportable, and people are weary to death. We have obtained fodder and shoes for the horses. I have decided to send Boshier to Pretoria to group together the French volunteers who have arrived by the Chargeurs-Réunis' boat. By all accounts they number three hundred, but I have written to Mr. Reitz to say that I will accept command over them if there are only one hundred. That may call me to Pretoria. Some good may come of this; but I shall not believe it until I see it, everything is so opposed to action in

## WAR NOTES

this country. Jorissen is returning to Pretoria.

*February 22.*—Yesterday's storm has delayed loading. Not an employé to be seen at the railway station, which was crowded with Boers! After careful search we discovered one who consented to send off Léon's horses to Pretoria, but our own belongings had to wait. At last, however, we set off, forming almost a special train. We took our seats on the benches of a truck, for there were no passengers' compartments.

News is as bad as it can be, and it is probable that I shall return from Colesberg very quickly—if I return at all. The formation of a French corps may straighten affairs, but I know the country too well to have any illusions.

The employés on the Free State railway are English, and there is a very bad service. We left, for example, at ten

## EN ROUTE FOR NORVALS

instead of eight o'clock, and were due to reach Norval's Pont at two in the afternoon. But at Springfontein, at about half-past one o'clock, I was told that I should have to wait for the train at eleven next morning. As I was travelling in a truck, there was no other alternative than camping alongside.

*February 23.* — As was only to be expected of the Dutch Railway Company, we left at a different time to that given yesterday. At eight o'clock, as I was boiling a bottle of milk, bought from the pastor, a boy came to say that we were going to start. I warmed the milk very insufficiently, and only had time to run with my saucepan, assisted by Bréda, who carried the mugs and sugar, to have our luncheon in our truck.

The landscape quickly changed. We were soon winding amidst rocky kopjes, which became closer and closer together

## WAR NOTES

until they completely shut in the line and the modest river between their steep sides. A rough country, in short; but with a character of its own—grass here and there in thick tufts; green farms in the hollows of the hills, and dams watering the verdure; sheep, ostriches, and woolly goats. Here and there were little laagers, with the same narrow valley and the same troops of animals. The kopjes slope towards the Orange.

The river, which flows with a certain majesty, had more water than I imagined between its perpendicular banks, and trees grow on either side along its course. Crossing an iron bridge, we reached Norval's Pont. At the station were railway sidings, a platform thronged with Boers, cattle-trucks, and small piles of provisions belonging to the Transvaal and Free State commissariats. At my request we were fairly quickly unloaded. I watered my horse, after which we hastily lunched,

## EN ROUTE FOR COLESBERG

amidst many interviews, at the house of the honest Boer who lent us his table and gave us an abominable tea for two shillings. We left for Colesberg at one o'clock. During the loading, a mule kicked at me and broke my watch-case! One more wreck! But, alas! I have lost count of disasters.

COLESBERG, *February* 25.—The morning found us up and about. Bréda, after perching on a box of provisions as if on an isolated rock in the midst of the downpour, took refuge at last in a waggon already occupied by Kaffirs. By cursing and striking he made a place for himself and had the full benefit of their smell for the rest of the night. I watched the flood from my bed, but fear of seeing the tent upset prevented me from closing an eye. The road follows a course among brown, melancholy-looking kopjes, and by successive curves the narrow barrier is easily crossed. The plain which it encloses

is sandy in places, and in places muddy, and slippery for the horses and waggons. I am sorry I did not push on yesterday evening to Colesberg, which we should have reached in the middle of the storm. It would have been better than the course we adopted. As we arrived at Colesberg, the sun, after a struggle with the wind, forced a way through the dense clouds, and one felt that the bad weather was over. The first rays of the sun fell pleasantly on the little town set in green between the brown kopjes. It is built like a cross with a Greek temple at the meeting-place of the two arms. It is a clean, smiling, carefully kept little place, although abandoned by nearly all its inhabitants. English neatness is apparent, and evidences of it appear in the flowers, the white-washed enclosures, the clean shops, the verandahs and footways bordered with well-planted trees giving pleasant shade. A few pretty women's faces—English, Afri-cander, or German—appear and disappear.

## COLESBERG

A pretty Anglican church, which is lit up in the evening, recalls England from its Gothic type. In a word, the general appearance of the place is attractive, and yet the town is empty. It is a body without a soul. The Free State Hotel, kept by some English people, is shut, but the stable is handed over to us on payment. In the meantime I go off to find the Kriegscommissariat. There isn't any! But, on the other hand, there is a magnificent Johannesburg ambulance, whose luxurious fittings are only equalled by the kindness of the *personnel*. Dr. Mangold, who was in charge, was excessively kind to us. He keeps open table, as far as I could see in the twenty-four hours spent with him, and has, moreover, a French cook, who gave me a cutlet and some roast beef, which reminded me of Voisin or of Durand. We drank excellent wine, and mineral water. The sight of eggs and fresh milk makes one forget the Transvaal, the war, and the approaching evacuation—one imagines

that one has nothing more to do but live pleasantly, that all the misery is over.

Seeing this model ambulance installed magnificently in the house of the chief magistrate, the church, the large shops, two or three cottages, and the concert hall of Colesberg, one asks oneself how it is possible to meet all this perfection, so out of proportion alongside this rudimentary military organisation. There is a model operating room, every arrangement for cutting, resecting, binding arteries. Everything clean and minutely cared for, order and method everywhere. A regular museum of jewels of steel, which one could admire without any *arrière pensée*, reclining in cases of velvet; basins and receptacles of every kind carefully covered with linen and gauze; beds for the patient, where he can submit his flesh to the healing knife and pour his blood into these spotless receptacles so carefully veiled and now so immaculate in their repose. Here are antiseptic baths, washing basins



## A MODEL AMBULANCE

for operations, iodoformed linen, clean white bandages carefully rolled—everywhere the same care, the same varied abundance. Close at hand is the pharmacy, with its bottles arranged like books. There are numerous wards for fever cases, for wounded, etc. Boers, Germans, English, all mixed together; there is even an Australian captain. A sentry is posted because of the wounded prisoners. The nurses, clothed in light blue with the red cross brassard, hurry to and fro, while hospital orderlies assist them. There are about eighty sick or wounded: one dying of typhus, a child, a man with an amputated limb who shows us the stump covered with linen, a Boer shot through the body whose wife in black watches at his bedside, a German shot in the stomach; the one is dying, the other will pull through. There is suffering, plenty of it, under the gauze coverings which protect the faces from the flies, but the general appearance is one of confidence,

## WAR NOTES

calm and peaceful. The air circulates freely, the temperature is pleasant, the room between the beds is sufficient, and the ceilings are lofty. Dr. Mangold is assisted by a young Russian, Dr. Sahol, who looks like a student in his first year, but as a matter of fact is so skilled a surgeon as to be head of a special department for which he is entirely responsible. He has been extraordinarily kind to me, and has shown me those delicate attentions which are worthy of the Russian spirit, so truly feminine in its tenderness for a human brother. After dining with a very agreeable commandant named Fouché (who wished to present me to-morrow to General Delarey), the land-rost of Bloemfontein, the Austrian Captain Gaertner (who had just arrived from Norval's Pont and who was principally remarkable for his appetite), and several Germans belonging to the Johannesburg Corps, I retired to a beautiful room where Dr. Mangold had determined that I should appreciate to the

## EN ROUTE FOR RENSBURG

full the comforts which he showers upon his guests. First of all I decided to go to Rensburg, where Generals Schoemann and Grobler are to gain an exact idea of the situation and to find Sauer. Riding towards Rensburg, I passed through the Boer positions along a line of rocky kopjes stretching for twenty miles in a straight line slightly curved in at the ends. Behind certain points the diminished laagers lay, for Colesberg has been stripped of men, who have been sent to the Modder River. An open plain makes communication easy, but how can twenty miles be held by a few thousand men? Round about one sees the fighting positions: here was the English artillery placed, whose fire destroyed the houses in the town and killed two people, without counting some of Her Majesty's Kaffirs. The Colesberg (Coles Kop?), a fine mass of rock, commands the surrounding mountainous country. It can be seen from everywhere, like a gigantic signal-tower com-

## WAR NOTES

manding the broken country round about. It is unoccupied now, but the English used one of its platforms for their artillery. Yesterday's rain causes a green appearance everywhere except on the gray-looking plain; the setting sun has those wonderful opaline tints, and a gallop is good at this time of day when the sun is losing its power. Here we are at the camp and among the general crowd of Boers. I am presented to the generals. We talk about events at the Modder. I have realised that everywhere perhaps in the two Republics the coming disaster to Cronje is ignored. The Boers do not admit such a possibility; even men like Delarey think that Cronje is not a commander who will ever surrender. When I remember the absence of news pointing to De Wet's powerlessness, it is difficult for me to retain any hope. Generals Schoemann and Grobler express agreeably and pleasantly their sympathy for France and her officers. Speaking

## RENSBURG

in English, I explain my views without an interpreter, and although they respond somewhat evasively to my wish to install myself to-morrow in their camp, I quickly understand that their departure is resolved upon. Sauer, who comes up, confirms my view. He is splendidly fitted out with poor Léon's admirably equipped waggon, and entertains General Schoemann's staff, all the landrosts and members of the Volksraad, his usual *clientèle*, useless as they are. I learn from him that the retreat behind the Orange River, the summons of General Delarey to Bloemfontein, and in fact all the measures I had proposed to President Steyn are decided upon. Sauer wishes me to go on ahead to Colesberg to join the column, and I return there to dine and sleep in great comfort as a preparation for to-morrow's troubles.

*February 26.*—Sauer told me nothing of it, but it is excusable. Camp was struck at

## WAR NOTES

8 P.M., and they muddled along the whole night in an entanglement of waggons stuck in the mud. He was obliged to remain with this column in a state of confusion, and only got out of it early in the morning to take the lead of the retreating force, and I met him outspanned at my old camp on the night of the flood. My waggon had gone on ahead, and was there also outspanned. I remained with Bréda to take my share of an excellent breakfast with the doctor, for the fact of the departure of the ambulance with all its wounded on the same morning does not prevent this remarkable organisation from breakfasting just as plentifully as yesterday. After many warm shakes of the hand, we caught up our waggon passing the head of Schoemann's carriages, which were beginning to debouch on to our road. We arrived at Norval's Pont, I going on ahead, and here I got many things from the commissariat of which I was in pressing need—biscuit in particular, as all ours had been

## MEETING WITH DELAREY

lost by the boys during the storm. I cooked the dinner, for that excellent B., apart from an oration on the subject of how to do it, doesn't know how to turn his hand to anything, and, like many people who are born to be waited on, is always in difficulties. "No meat." That will continue for some time, I expect, but with butter, rice, potatoes, although these are damaged, and an onion, one can get a very good dinner. We slept in a room which had been turned into a stable, and which I got cleaned out. Bréda snores loudly, and maintains that I never help him in anything. Well, we are quits. During the evening, I was presented to General Delarey by Commandant Fouché. He is a tall man, thin, with a great black beard, a keen and intelligent eye, who answers quickly and decidedly all the questions which pour in on him. We talked privately. I inform him of the result of my visit to the President, and the part I

## WAR NOTES

hope to see him play in the Free State, and what I think of events on the Modder River. His views are the same as mine about Cronje's position, and he does not consider the Modder a *point d'appui*, as it can be crossed anywhere. He had pointed out to Cronje a position in triangle to cover Kimberley, and I remark that his military intuition had caused him to discover the tactical value of Jomini's famous "caput porci," or the echeloning in retreat of both wings, which I had learned from a manœuvre of the Sixth Corps carried out by the regretted General Miribel. I fully realise that I am in the presence of a man worthy of high command and well instructed, and I beg the general to be good enough to post me to his staff, if he goes to the Modder, or to keep me here, if he comes back, which latter is not likely.

*February 27.*—I breathe the fresh air from the top of my waggon, placed on a



## FORAGING

truck, with a crowd of Boers at my feet. I quickly decide what to do, as all the commandos are moving to the Modder, and the English cannot move out of Naauwport on account of their want of men. Even those who are in front of General Grobler are retiring, though we ourselves are retreating. With the help of the landrost of Bloemfontein, M. Papenfus, whom I met one evening at Dr. Mangold's, I got my horses, mules, and waggon on to the train. I see Sauer again, undisturbed as usual, who wishes, but cannot join me, but who gives me a leg of mutton. I rob the commissariat of a few potatoes, and get, with infinite trouble, some forage. It is a case of getting what you can, and I manage like a real Boer. The day before I got all I could from the commissariat, and am partly revictualled and ready for wherever fortune may call me. The entraining is carried out quickly, thanks to the general goodwill of all. We get into our places, and breakfast

## WAR NOTES

comfortably enough; for I have put our waggons in thorough order, and have everything now handy for when I want it. For our coffee, I send to the engine for water, and it is as good as usual. I received a most agreeable visit from C. Papenfus, the son of the landrost. He is already a soldier, and has been under fire, though only twelve years old. He carries a Mauser carbine. For a month past he has served at the front, and I should like to see some of our young French boys as clear-headed, agreeable, and intelligent as this brave boy, with whom one can talk as if he were a man. I was able to give him some water-melon and chocolate, and to invite him to dine with me in our waggon, as we only arrive at Bloemfontein between 8 and 10 P.M. I have got to that stage of campaigning when one's intelligence derives advantage from things apparently the least suited to satisfy it. It is the stage a soldier ought to arrive at. One's brain makes use of everything about,

## CAMPING OUT

with an ingenuity and resolution which do not belong to ordinary life. One astonishes others and one astonishes oneself by one's power of foreseeing everything, even the smallest detail, like the loading of the waggon, the arrangements for food for men, black and white, horses, mules, etc. I am marvellously well now I have recovered from my fatigue, but I am a ragged sight. Everything I have is dirty and my money is gone.

*February 28.*—We passed the night on or under the waggon. Bréda prefers to stretch himself at full length, even if it is in the middle of the Kaffirs; as for me, I am afraid of their smell. . . . I confess I manage to sleep in all positions, even the most impossible, and against objects whose angles give no possible means of support. The disagreeable part consists in moving when one's limbs have become numb or stiff. The human body is, after all, not badly made,

## WAR NOTES

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## WAR NOTES

particularly when one works it hard. As the soldier must be superior in some way, it is generally in point of endurance. Intellectual people take everything else for themselves. But before closing an eye, one must consult the omens, in this case the employés of the Free State Railway, and learn our fate from them. The waggon remains at the railway station ; the horses and mules are to be detrained. Extraordinary to say, somebody has already detrained the horses. Who has done this? We run about in the darkness among the horses' quarters, feeling their withers, trying their coats. Nothing can be seen but gentle beasts, who allow themselves to be felt over, astonished at these midnight caresses. Finally, my horse Colenso neighs to me from out of a strange group of horses to which they have led him astray. My mare and Bréda's horse have got stranded far away, but after much trouble we make sure of them. Having again got possession of

## COLLECTING HORSES

our horses, we seek for our bundle of forage which we left under the waggon; but the Boers have taken it, and I find the marks of it on the road along which its ravishers dragged it. Our poor animals have to go fasting. The next morning we were awake at daybreak. While Bréda was giving his ideas as to what ought to be done, without doing anything, which is thoroughly French, especially in certain circles, I went to the horses, which I, of course, found scattered about. After collecting them, I proceeded to feed them myself, as I had no boy. Having done this, and being irritated at the laziness of the blacks and annoyed at having to do other people's work, I went and had a cup of coffee and some excellent cakes in the market square. I took the opportunity to do some marketing on my own account, and filled the hood of my cloak with tomatoes. When I shall have given B. some orders, had a wash, and spoken to the station-master, then, convinced that the landrost of Bloem-

## WAR NOTES

fontein, whose cart is on my truck, will push matters on, I shall wait like a Stoic until the stick-in-the-mud officials choose to run the truck up to the platform. The foreign military attachés are at Bloemfontein, with Colonel Gourko at their head. They have a heavy train. Some, like the French Captain Demange and Quartermaster Raoul Duval, have white servants to look after their boys; the others have nobody. This way of managing, which inevitably ends in the rich having to help the poor, is sure to produce difficulties. Still, as they are all under the direction of a grandson of Mr. Kruger, they will keep together in some fashion. As a matter of fact, they do not associate very much. Raoul Duval showed me the results of his marketing, from which it is easy to see why they don't live together, and how little they understand arranging for their provisions. He, like Captain Demange, has been most kind, and gave me some letters from France about



## GOOD NEWS FROM HOME

which I was very anxious, as the mails had brought me nothing. The good news from home shows me that I am in the path God has chosen for me, as nothing calls me back. I naturally saw nothing of the other attachés. I shall see them again at the Modder. I met General Delarey again, who expects to leave for the Modder the day after tomorrow with Commandant Fouché. But orders are not yet issued, and confusion reigns supreme. No one knows anything, and it is quite useless to read the rubbish in the newspapers. I repeat here that Cronje could only have surrendered, as he has not been set free, and they are concealing the fact from us. No delay on the part of the English would explain a contrary state of affairs. What is De Wet doing? What are the rest of them doing? They are just waiting, as they are not allowed to attack—waiting till Kitchener has finished and chooses to attack them. I spent the evening pleasantly with M. and Mme. Belse,

## WAR NOTES

Africanders, and heard some music, which, although it was English, was well sung. I had thought that quite impossible. They asked me to give them my idea of the future course of affairs. I gave it them as a secret, but without any hesitation. Inasmuch as I believed that in view of their astonishing successes they would assume the strategic offensive at the right moment, so now I have realised that they have allowed the right moment to go by, and that victory will go to the other side in spite of the faults that side has committed. However, there we are, and the Boer inertia having only increased with time, Kitchener's advance will increase in pace by the law of strategic importance proportioned to its success.

*March 1.*—The day of departure postponed on account of supplies. In the morning a photograph was taken of our group, which was interfered with by the rain. When I got back to our tent at midday, I

## BOER PATRIOTISM

found the Kaffir Jack had let my mare get loose. I send him to look for her, and if he doesn't find her I will bring him before the landrost. Neither he nor the mare will ever turn up. Heavy rain, so we stay in the tent, after having made huge trenches round it. Towards nine o'clock the downpour ceases, but too late to think of starting. Bréda, who came in from Bloemfontein, informs me that Cronje's surrender is officially announced : it is Thursday, and the surrender was on Tuesday. I do not know what effect it will have on the authorities. The people about me to whom one tells the news content themselves with saying "So!" with the greatest indifference. One has reckoned so much on the patriotism of the Boers, and I have heard so much of it, that perhaps the feeling of disenchantment is excessive. Too much cannot be said in praise of those heroes who die for the independence of their country ; but the Boer does all he can to save his skin, and he must know that

## WAR NOTES

that is under cover to be able to make any use of his *sang froid* and wonderful power of shooting.

*March 2.*—Departure after a night's delay. As usual, a wretched journey, the road covered with stolid Boers, whose placidity is undisturbed by anything except shells and bullets, which find them legs at once. We passed a laager. God knows why it was there, as it had come from Koodoosrand, where the military attachés were to have been yesterday. I learn from a Boer that we are on the road to General De Wet. We make use of a farm for breakfast. These people are remarkable. At 1 P.M. a great lout gets out of bed, has a look at us, and then back he goes to bed again. They complain of being near the high road. When one suggests that they make a profit by the prices they get for things, they complain of the trouble it gives them. We take, as a matter of fact, the route I took

## CRONJE'S LAAGER

first of all to Cronje's late laager, which joins the Modder at Abraham's Kraal, leaving the Petrusburg road to the south. This latter branches off to the left after the first store, where we slept with Léon. At this store are the attachés, and Demange asks me and my followers to dine with him. They have separated, but the French are with Colonel Gourko and another. Their table is as ample as their hospitality.

*March 3.*—A long march with General De Wet. One sees nothing but Boers, who are returning from the front with their horses. It looks like the end of everything. They say the English have relieved Ladysmith, and that Joubert has recrossed the frontier. I am afraid that the English, when they make up their minds to move, will play De Wet the same trick they did Cronje. The war seems more and more to me to be finished, and the attitude the Boers themselves adopt is simply an

## WAR NOTES

evidence of their usual hypocrisy or childish superstition. We stopped at Abraham's Kraal, where we were rejoined by Demange and his waggons. The other attachés had gone by mistake to Petrusburg. They will get back by another road. We sleep in a deserted farm, where the most complete disorder reigns. I admire M. Raoul Duval's gorgeous bed and mosquito-curtains, and he is proportionately surprised at my simple arrangements. Demange and he have done everything magnificently—canteens, etc., of the most splendid kind. In fact, all the things a gentleman should have. This gives them no trouble in their position as neutrals. It would have been out of place for me, and quite beyond my means. My hardy way of living is rather too much in evidence, and I begin to be rather ashamed of it.

*March 4.*—We leave rather late, but not before I have to hustle up my fellows, who are fond of sleep; and as I was angry, coffee

## A LUXURIOUS CARRIAGE

was left out of the programme. On the way we add to our commissariat to help us out for the day and to-morrow. We arrived in heavy rain, and were very well received by General De Wet's secretary, who gave us a good cup of coffee and some bread from the English waggon which the general captured at Koffiefontein. In the waggon are two beds; in front there is a table at which to write and eat; on the left a washhand-stand, and boxes all round which serve as seats. In fact, it is a most luxurious carriage for a campaign, in which all the usual duties of life can be carried on without disarranging anything or altering the usual life of a house. The general soon arrived, and we were presented to him by M. Rau, an estimable German, almost a Boer, who acts as a messenger between — and Petrusburg. The general was agreeable, but not very communicative. He has an energetic and thoughtful appearance. He is evidently very anxious

## WAR NOTES

Desertion is decimating his ranks, and he has only 9000 men to hold a line of kopjes which take four hours, mounted and riding fast, to go round. We bivouac near the general in a pleasant enclosure surrounded with poplar and Barbary fig trees. All of a sudden a boy comes and tells us that M. Wyland's horse has fallen into the Modder and been drowned. My series of misfortunes with horses continue as usual. We feel the want of a third boy to look after them.

I have just visited the positions and found them childishly unsound. The English, who, like ourselves, are on the left bank of the Modder — vigorously attacked, now that it is an obstacle—may find themselves disagreeably cornered. But what is the good of combinations? Before, there were no generals; now, in addition, there are no men. They can be seen fleeing on the roads with their led horses. Desertion is universal, just as



## RETURN TO THE MODDER

there is utter demoralisation. Those who are frank anxiously question you about the end of the war, whilst those who still pose are generally men who are trying to assume an attitude which will act as a corrective to their cowardice. There have always been three classes of men in the laagers: the elite, those who fight because of their temperament or conscience; the dead weight, those who always remain at the laager and count at meal-times only; and those who have influential relatives, or the protection of a member of the Volksraad, whose time is spent on leave, and who become more jingo the farther they are from the front. But why be astonished? Such things are inevitable in any social and political state if military bonds are not drawn tighter around a people, even to the point of cutting to the flesh, in the hour of its crisis. Man, without discipline or military virtue, possesses all his natural weaknesses—the

## WAR NOTES

ordinary man of course, for the hero is an exception. Heroic tradition is perhaps less here than elsewhere. The Boer's first concern is for his safety. He measures himself against an adversary only when he is surrounded by the boulders of a kopje. Those who attack—or rather who can be trained to attack—are so much the more admirable and rare, as it is making them act in contradiction to all the principles of their education. The Boer is a serious adversary on account of his excellent horse and marksmanship; but to try to make him into a hero is going counter to his nature. Though success may have stimulated the majority at the opening of the campaign, when abandonment of the home was too recent to be painful, reverses, after five months' hostilities, are entailing disaster. It is evident that the end is only a question of hours.

The positions do not cover anything, and invite the enemy to make that out-

## INSECURITY OF DE WET

flanking movement which will bring us to a stand on the Modder, and result, as with Cronje, in De Wet's capitulation.

The Boer position forms a concave arc opposite the English right. It is outflanked on the left, and the laagers, which are from two to two and a half miles distant from the principal group on that side, guard a large plain on the left uselessly: for if the outflanking movement is made tactically, it will pass between them and the principal corps; and if it is strategical, they will have no command over it. At first sight this strategical movement appears to have commenced, and two days hence at the most it will have reached its full development. War with such innocence on one of the sides is simply a manœuvre against a dummy enemy.

I visited these positions full of anxiety on account of their insecurity, and noted the same instability amongst those who held them. Our hour, therefore, is near.

## WAR NOTES

Whilst on my journey — startling hares and korhaans — I assisted, with Bréda, at a somewhat curious chase. Two falcons were chasing a bustard. Following them with interest, we also began to take part in the sport, galloping after the bird when it was driven to earth by the birds of prey. Our horses entered into the spirit of this game of battledore and shuttlecock. After twenty minutes the bustard, stunned by the falcons' beaks and exhausted with flying, was killed by us and hung on Bréda's saddle.

Terrible storms follow one on the other. Yesterday night was atrocious, and to-night promises to be the same.

*March 5.*—Left early to reconnoitre with Bréda and another Frenchman named Peinpen, who is with a Boer commando. Our reconnaissance was very exciting. We knew that another, commanded by General Botha, was in front of us. However, when the hori-

## EXCITING RECONNAISSANCE

zon is so extensive as here, it is impossible to distinguish the dress of a man seen in the distance. We were advancing cautiously, although without suspicion, towards a body of horsemen silhouetted on the horizon, when we were fired at on our right—that is, from the side of the enemy. At that moment the horsemen in front moved forward to forage in very regular line, which told us they were trained troops; and on our left we saw other horsemen galloping towards us. So we wheeled round to draw nearer to the Boer positions which were still in view. No sooner had we done so than shots were fired at us from the scrub. We then set off at full gallop, and did not slacken rein until we saw the Boers running to meet us. Their eyes, better than our glasses, convinced us that a mistake had been made. We had been pursued by General Botha's reconnoitring party; or, rather, his men, after a skirmish with the English mounted

## WAR NOTES

infantry, were withdrawing at the same time as others, who appeared to be trying to cut us off, but who were really riding after the general's horse, which had escaped.

Although the chief of the general's scouts advised us to return with his men, our isolation in front of the English lines appearing to him dangerous, we continued our survey. I knew, in fact, that Boer reconnaissances were generally limited to an action with the enemy's patrols, or a raid on their horses, and that they withdrew without obtaining information as to British movements. It was essential that I should obtain this, for I hoped to guarantee, at the least, my own safety and that of my waggon, in case General De Wet, determined to suffer Cronje's fate, persisted, notwithstanding information, in facing the English left, heedless of the extensive movement on the right. We were soon joined by a Boer, who, mistaking us for

## EXCITING RECONNAISSANCE

English, advanced, shouting: "Hands up!" When he saw that he had to deal with the "French Colonel," his face broke into a smile, and we fell into conversation. He was on his way to four Boers who had remained in a farm quite near to the English lines, whence we thought the enemy had fired at us. It appeared, therefore, that the shots were a present from our own side. We accompanied the new-comer, and, as we approached the farm, waved our hats. The party was retreating, but they were able to give me some useful information. After shaking hands, they left us to continue our exploration alone, waving a saucepan, which they had found in the farm, as they disappeared in the distance. I wanted to find out if the English had outflanked us, including a laager of patrols; and also under what conditions their movement was being made—whether it was strategical or tactical. In order to do that it was

## WAR NOTES

necessary for me to reach the enemy's positions, cross the Petrusburg road, and advance as far as the ground would allow to the low levels, which in all probability concealed the movement. Mirages of men, columns, clouds of dust, and other indications appear in the clear Transvaal atmosphere just like mirages of water. We were obliged to clear up all doubts whilst approaching.

Shortly, English columns proceeding towards the south-west and skirting other English positions, already established and guarded, came into view. I concluded it was a successive movement of unities—a kind of oblique manœuvre *à la Frederic*, outflanking the Boer camps. Farther on, I surprised a cavalry regiment manœuvring, which might have been the apparition of a big column. Waiting awhile, the appearance of a long file of waggons made me conclude that it was rather the escort of a convoy from Jacobsdal. At



## EXCITING RECONNAISSANCE

one time, continuing our operations, we were 1600 yards from an advance guard, and this nearness might have awakened salutary reflections had not our attention been drawn to a big cloud of dust on our left having all the appearance of being raised by an important column. Galloping towards it made us forget everything, even the most elementary prudence. After a long observation, which corrected the first from the point of view of indications, and reduced the incident to a simple movement of squadrons, we returned peaceably, sparing our horses as much as possible. Suddenly, on our left, and at less than two hundred yards distance, we were greeted with a volley, and amidst the crackling of a hot fusilade our horses wildly dashed away. Fortunately we were not on our own exhausted animals, having borrowed three excellent mounts at the last laager we had visited. Their vigour saved us, for the English kept up a hot fire until we were out

## WAR NOTES

of range. I still cannot understand how—presenting such a good target as we did, and at such a short distance—this ambush missed us. The platoon must have been greatly out of breath in running up the hillside. I imagine also that my black coat and European appearance, as well as the daring nature of our reconnoissance, specially marked us out for their fire. At the distance they were firing their suppositions must have become amply justified.

On getting back, I had a conversation with General Botha, brother of General Louis Botha of Colenso, and like him a charming, intelligent man, equally endowed physically. Communicating my notes to him, I expressed a fear, in view of the incoherent interspacing of our positions, that he was cut off from General De Wet. Like myself, he considered the situation was critical, and appeared no less to share my ideas on the new tactic

## CONVERSATION WITH DE WET

necessary,—that is, simply the placing of a mask opposite the English to retard their progress, and the organisation on their lines of a series of methodical attacks so as to make their forward movement more and more impossible. Much to my regret, I was not so well, or at least so seriously, understood by General De Wet, when able (not until early next day, owing to my late return to camp) to have a talk with him on the subject. I did not think he would be attacked that day, but probably the day following. I declared that, in any case, he was completely out-flanked, and if the English postponed their attack it would be with the object of surrounding him on the Modder. He replied that he had just sent reinforcements to General Botha. But he remained buried in the unfathomable security of the Boer—whether feigned through a need for inaction, or the natural result of incommensurable heedlessness, one cannot tell.

## WAR NOTES

*March 6.*—It was, then, at dawn that I saw the general, and about ten o'clock the English had already confirmed my words. I shall have played in De Wet's as in Cronje's case the part of a Cassandra, and, as I had no reason in the case of either to conceal from the Boers fears which everybody could verify only too well, the Boers are convinced that I saw clearly on the Modder as well as on the Tugela. If I am not over-insisting by nature, and have a particular horror of meddling with things for which I am not responsible, I have always made a point, even at the greatest personal risk, of fulfilling the mission of a counsellor to the generals who received me with kindness at their headquarters—a mission which, in my opinion, ought to answer to that kindness. If events have so markedly proved me in the right, I am far from attributing merit to myself. There is no troop in mimic warfare, acting against a designated enemy,

## IN FULL RETREAT

whose manœuvres one cannot prophesy. Now, the English were exercising against a simple butt. What made their action more significant on that day was the arrival of President Kruger at the Hoofd-laager whilst the first cannon-shots of the front and flank attacks were resounding. He had barely ten minutes in which to converse with one or other of his generals. I learnt that he was thinking of forming a large body of Europeans under my command. He was dressed in a black suit made by a tailor who certainly had nothing English about him, and on his head was the inevitable tall hat, which he puts on the first thing on waking, just as he might put on a crown, and does not leave off until he goes to bed. He spoke like a man who remembered all the natural features of a country where he formerly hunted big game. But suddenly he got into his carriage, and whilst his mules took him at a gallop towards Abraham's

## WAR NOTES

Kraal one might have said that the fortune of two Republics was being routed by that of Great Britain, henceforth triumphant. The truth is that the English, by acting in a large body, as they ought to have done at the beginning, and choosing the proper place for invasion, can merely be retarded in the future. In fact, they are decidedly masters of the situation.

Those who witnessed the abandonment of De Wet's positions without an infantry engagement, owing to the simple depressing impression of 40,000 men deployed on the plain, have also come to the sad conclusion that the Boer bands are demoralised. The retreat was not transformed into a rout because it took place without a fight; and because the English, fatigued by their deployment and too far away, were unable to follow in pursuit.

After hastily despatching my waggon, I searched in vain for a position where

## IN FULL RETREAT

some of the Boers might have determined to hold their ground. They were breaking into groups over the whole field, proceeding confusedly alongside the waggons, the file of which marked the way to Abraham's Kraal. They did not hurry themselves; they were sure about having plenty of time, and sure also of the determination not to fight. I tried to retain some of them on a big kopje which commanded the entire plain exactly above the route. They listened to me with the heedlessness of men whose minds are made up. I then went off, and it was not until after my departure that a section of the Free State artillery came very deliberately to the foot of this position to open fire. The waggons of the attachés, which left a long time after my waggon, were already far off. Colonel Gourko's waggon, having broken its axle when leaving the laager, had had to be abandoned under charge of his servant. The English captured it, as well

## WAR NOTES

as the Colonel, who, having tarried on a kopje, had a bad time between the fire of the Boers and the English dragoons. I had feared at first that the enemy's cavalry might outstrip us at Abraham's Kraal, in which case it would have captured everything without resistance. But, after having commenced an attack and captured the rear of our convoy, it did not proceed farther, either because of fatigue or timidity. Only some artillery followed us on the right bank of the Modder, with the probable intention of cannonading our camp. The threat, however, was not carried into effect. After unharnessing at the kraal to water the animals, I took the waggon two miles farther on to a better military position, where, besides, the Johannesburg police were trying to stop the fugitives. My plans for camping there were modified by the general departure of the waggons, and it was not until nearly midnight that — once more stopped by



## FUTURE PLANS

bodies of police—we unharnessed for good. The fugitives were stretched out in an irregular line; and, although the waggons were retained, the horsemen escaped through the meshes.

*March 7.*—We left at dawn to camp at the intersection of the Petrusburg and Abraham's Kraal roads. On the previous evening I was joined by fifteen Frenchmen from Pretoria; and in the morning fifteen others came. Many were bearers of letters, the contents of which ill accorded with our disastrous situation; they were full of hope for the Boers, and enthusiastic over their attitude. Alas! their attitude appeared very lamentable to those Frenchmen who had come for success and found disaster. I had known brighter prospects at the outset. Four Frenchmen, who had joined a German company at Colesberg, also came to me—making a total of forty men under my command. I shall tell them

## WAR NOTES

this evening what I expect them to do. They will form the nucleus of the foreign corps which those in high places are thinking of forming. If the little Etchegoyen-Courtenay group—left behind at Bloemfontein and scattered whither I know not—rejoins me, I shall have fifty men more or less mounted and armed, but all of them anxious to fight. Therefore, leaving our waggons here within reach of Bloemfontein, I shall lead them back to-morrow to the front, now held by General Delarey with a body of reserves, which arrived from Colesberg and passed us yesterday during the night. This half-day's rest was indispensable for our poor horses, and short though the halt has been for the mules, it was very necessary in view of the unknown journey which may lead us back to the Transvaal.

*March 8 and 9.*—I am getting confused as to dates, and cannot guarantee this to be

## UNDER DELAREY

the 9th. I am writing this under the shade of a mimosa tree in the veldt, about three miles from Abraham's Kraal. We are in the front line commanded by General Delarey, and under the immediate orders of General Cronje, the Free State general. Have we any outposts? I haven't the slightest idea, and quite readily believe that they have made a virtue of economy in respect of them. Are there any English near us? No one knows, and as far as the Boers are concerned these 40,000 men have disappeared without our knowing if they have gone north or south. It is all very difficult to understand. After having prepared everything for a big battle, why have the English disappeared? I believe they are comfortably quartered in the positions we have abandoned, where they are re-organising their supply services preparatory to a farther advance. Any way, our people make no attempt to find out. When I arrived here at the head of my forty

## WAR NOTES

Frenchmen, there was a council of war going on and also a very lively quarrel between General Delarey and one of his commandants. The contrast between the two men was striking. The general is tall, thin, upright, and dressed like a soldier, while the commandant was dressed like a clergyman, which I thought he was. I need scarcely say the only course which the commandant saw possible was to retreat. A large body of Boers had just scattered themselves about in bivouac along a line of kopjes. There was no distribution of forage or rations. Each man lived on what he had got, like the horses do on the veldt. The council of war discussed the question of whether a successive series of kopjes should be held in order to cover Bloemfontein, or simply the kopjes near the town. They do not appear to have settled what the usual routine of a kriegsrath is. We settled ourselves down near the commandant of the Johannesburg police. These latter

## A FRENCH TROOP

are regular soldiers. I then went off to reconnoitre with my glasses. I did not see any English, but I saw an enormous number of hares on one of the kopjes. Now I am breathing the glorious air common to these altitudes, and enjoying the breeze, which is perfect when only it chooses to blow. I have got together all the Frenchmen I expected, viz. about forty. They are moderately mounted and pretty well armed. They have waggons, and appear anxious to do well. Among them there is a Russian, M. Bagration, who left the Caucasus intending to travel, but made a détour to get to the Transvaal. He is of the same semitic type as the Tcherkess, rides admirably a very fine horse, and is quite at home on the steppe, but does not understand why I leave his waggon so far behind. Among my young fellows are d'Etchegoyen and Bréda, cavalry officers, who command troops, and a naval lieutenant, Chateauvieux, who arrived at the beginning of the war and has fought

## WAR NOTES

through the campaign. He and three comrades left a group of Germans commanded by Captain Gaertner at Colesberg and arrived here yesterday. The troop commanded by d'Etchegoyen lost its way and fell back on Petrusburg, but, warned of the English advance, joined us here. Our attaché, M. Demange, has had to leave his cart, which has gone back to Bloemfontein with the rest of the mission, and he now joins me on horseback. To-morrow's reconnaissance will clear up the situation. How many we are it is quite impossible to say. How many Boers have been stopped by the police and have come back? They say 8000. Let us put it at 4000.

*March 10.*—Yesterday I had a bad evening and night. Bréda and I have both lost our horses owing to the carelessness of the man who looked after them. All inquiries during the night and at daybreak were in vain. While I was reconnoitring beyond

## A RECONNAISSANCE

Abraham's Kraal I saw our horses among some abandoned by the English. I sent Bréda to catch them. I shall say a prayer to St. Antoine, for I never thought I should see them again. This reconnaissance took me along the Modder up to the English advanced posts. But as we were seen we had to fall back quickly to avoid being cut off. A few shots were fired at us without doing us any harm, but we had to hide in ravines and cross places which looked impossible in order to get back. My young men lose all order and salute all the shots, but this will improve. On our return we took up our position on the left of the Boer line, where the turning movement was being carried out. There are 12,000 to 13,000 English. They fire several cannon shots at the kopjes where two of our cannon are in position. A shrapnel bullet struck Captain Demange in the thigh severely. —, who accompanied him, came to tell me of his wound and of

## WAR NOTES

his departure for Bloemfontein. He was covered with blood from a man of the Johannesburg police who was wounded close to him. As for us, excepting for some maxim fire at the cavalry which out-flanks us, we do nothing but look at the movement, which cannot develop into a fight, as the Boers never attack, and the English wish to close the trap before commencing the assault. Tired of this useless waiting, I remount, and move my bivouac near the Modder. Here I can water and feed the horses. Here are shade and bathing for the men. Here I am, a colonel of a European army, and I have to perform the smallest routine duties. I do not complain of the utter confusion which is supreme, for it is one of the curiosities of the situation. Every one is very civil, and tries to help me as far as possible. When they make coffee, they each vie with one another as to who shall provide me with the largest amount. Any meal without



## UNCERTAINTY

tea or coffee does not count for me now. Some stimulant is necessary with all this physical exertion. At seven o'clock they tell me every one is leaving. No order is given. Some one passing at full gallop throws me this piece of information. I send M. Geyer, an intelligent Hollander, to the commandant of the Johannesburg police, Van Dam, to find out what is going on. Van Dam is a most agreeable man, and a very vigorous commander. As Geyer is a long time coming back, I go off myself, and meet a lieutenant of the police, from whom I learn that we remain at our bivouac to fight to-morrow in the direction of Petrusburg. When I get back to my own people I find the horses saddled up. The Boers told them to as they went by. No orders, or apparently any chance of getting them. We move towards the Bloemfontein road. Courtenay informs me all is altered, and that the police are retiring. We close in on them, and finally I learn from the com-

## WAR NOTES

mandant that we move on Bloemfontein. General Delarey wished to defend it, but General De Wet, just arrived from Bloemfontein, orders the retreat. The question was put to the vote, the Boers being unanimously in favour of retreating. A dusty and silent night march with the Johannesburg police. My people worked hard and well. Bivouacked at the first store we came to, a place where I have slept twice before.

*March 11.*—Departure for Bloemfontein. The English salute us with a few salvos, which do no harm. We left the last, but I was anxious to spare the horses. The route lies through the débris of Boer encampments. We halt at a farm, where my Frenchmen take possession of some turkeys and ducks, without forgetting to supply themselves with some cabbages, carrots, and other garden produce. It is a prelude to the hunt after horses which

## WHAT WILL THEY DO?

will take place to-morrow night near Bloemfontein. I get two animals, which my boy brings me in triumph. Where he got them I haven't an idea. I have no time to look into matters, for it is a question of coming to an important decision when one receives a definite order or a direction to follow which has been issued amidst the confusion and alarm of a defeat. Will they defend Bloemfontein or not? It would be madness, for the road on the right bank of the Modder comes out near Brandfort and cuts off the defenders of the town from their natural line of retreat. The position which would cover Bloemfontein should be occupied on the right bank at a place which would not be suspected. I know of such a place, and only wish I had a thousand Frenchmen with me to show the English how I would do it.

*March* 12.—Departure at 3 A.M. The difficulties of command in an irregularly

## WAR NOTES

organised force are stupendous by reason of the want of system and the desire of each individual to think only of his own wants. A slow march with long halts. All the waggons, excepting the one with a broken pole, arrive about one o'clock at a drift near the railway bridge over the Modder. I leave the advanced scouts to reconnoitre a defensible position at a farm on the other side of the Modder. Bréda informs me that the drift is difficult to cross. I go there and order the party by another road to another drift. I found Chateaufieux, who, with admirable decision, having commandeered a waggon pole from some one, had brought up the missing waggon. A delightful halting-place, from which it was difficult to get the men and horses to move. But it is full time to be moving on Brandfort. I see the waggons arranged in bivouac, and return to the farm where we were this morning, as the English may arrive there at daybreak. It was a

## A NIGHT MARCH

difficult march across the veldt, but we got to our destination just as we were going to give it up as a bad job. It is a point to remember; and, in spite of military necessity, I shall give up these night marches across a country without roads. To bed at 12.30; up at 4.

*March 13.*—The cannon thunders on Bloemfontein. We remain ready saddled up. The horses had plenty of oats last night, for the farm was full of forage. Poor brutes, they wanted it. The tendency of people here who are not accustomed to horses is to have several of them, with the result that two or three ill-fed, worn-out animals do not make one good one. The positions settled, we wait. The English do not come. They evidently think it quite sufficient to push before them the terrified Boers. It is no longer an army to destroy; it has become a body of peasants looking for their farms, with no single idea but their

## WAR NOTES

own safety, and giving that idea up for the moment only in order to catch the horses grazing on the plain. A short cannonade precedes the entry into Bloemfontein on the heels of these runaways. No destruction of the railway; no attempt even at the Modder River bridge. There was not a single dynamite cartridge to be got. All this is heart-breaking when one thinks of the time spent and the means which were at the disposal of these councils of war, these kriegsrathe and all the whole band of directors, etc. It is impossible even to help by giving advice, there is such an utter absence of any power to use it. I put my waggons in a place of safety and took up a good position. When it was evident that there was nothing more to be done, I left about mid-day with part of my detachment. About a dozen, who came late, were left behind. You cannot exercise any discipline or urge any military necessity on people who have come to South Africa on business, and

## START FOR BRANDFORT

who simply go to war to fill up the time. With some brilliant exceptions, they want too much sleep and food to be much good as soldiers. At the most they might do in the commandos. They arrived ready for defeat, and in the disaster they disappear. At 12 o'clock we start for Brandfort. The want of proper management irritated me, and I decided to give up my command, which is only slavery without its compensations. As we move along at a walk to spare our horses, a cloud of dust appears on our left, and presently we see the scouts of the English advanced squadrons. The English have made a movement to surround us by Brandfort. We galloped quickly to the town, where our carriages should be. Our worn-out horses make a last effort, to the great astonishment of their riders. Finally, in spite of the keenness of the advancing squadrons, we gain on them, and when they see us moving on Brandfort, probably thinking that our force is larger

## WAR NOTES

than it really is, slow down and finally halt. That gives us time to harness the horses, and while the convoy prepares to march on Kroonstadt, I make my few rifles take up a position on the right of the village with the outer flanks in echelon, to guard against being surrounded. While waiting, a violent altercation arose with the landrost, who was afraid that any firing would involve reprisals from the English. I informed him in English, French, and German of my opinion of his cowardly behaviour, and assured him that if the English came, I would show him how a few Frenchmen could hold a position abandoned by the Boers. Meanwhile, our waggons had left, night was coming on, and it was evident that the English would not attack. I went to the station to pay my respects to General Joubert, and to get from him a few horses to replace those killed by my horsemen in learning how to ride. I profited by the opportunity to get a good gray horse for



## RETURN TO BRANDFORT

myself. We follow our waggons down the road to Winberg. At some distance from Brandfort a messenger from General Joubert begs me to return to Brandfort and occupy some kopjes near General Delarey. At this hour it is impossible to carry out the order, and I return to Brandfort, where I sleep at the hotel in spite of the fears of my men, who can only get a promise out of me to assemble at the station at 9 o'clock. They start off and sleep at a farm seven miles from Brandfort. This instance of their power of cohesion shows what my detachment is worth. For my part, I considered it as no longer existing, and went my own way.

*March 14.*—March to Winberg, where we find the waggons. The sick remained at Bloemfontein or went by train to Kroonstadt. Some remained behind, to be captured by the English; some stopped at Brandfort station, waiting for a train.

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## WAR NOTES

Then a ten-hour ride to be got through at a gallop so as to arrive before night. Great reception by the landrost, who makes a great parade of outraged patriotism in a speech delivered to the Frenchmen while eating at the hotel. This I translate with a good deal of embroidery. He gives us rations, forage, and pays for our drinks and dinner. Other civilities finish with more drinks, in spite of overwhelming fatigue and the desire to sleep. Several Germans here, among whom is the head of the police at Winberg. They are very civil. I have always met with great civility from Germans in South Africa, who are always pleased if you speak German to them.

*March 15.*—They had thought of sending my waggons by rail, but after seeing the station-master, it was obvious that everything was upside down. I warn Bréda that we leave at 11 o'clock. I say good-bye to

## A SCENE

the landrost, who is by no means the man he was last night. He is evidently one man in the evening and quite another in the morning. At 11.30 I bade adieu to my Frenchmen, regretting the few good ones, but having no illusions as to the rest of them, who have too largely developed ideas as to the amount of food and rest they require ever to become men of war. Our march lay through a swarm of locusts, by lovely plains to a store kept by a Jew, who made a scene because we were dining near a shed which belonged to him, and threatened to hand us over to the landrost for violation of private property. I insult him with all the English expressions I can think of, and refuse to move, so I sleep in his shed.

*March 16.*—The Englishman apologised, and we part the best of friends, after exchanging our ideas on current events. There are governments who would do well

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## WAR NOTES

to think over this incident. If I had obeyed his order and gone off, he would have despised me profoundly. Remember that last evening he knew my rank, just as well as he knew it to-day, and that he did not take me for a Boer, as he endeavoured to explain to me afterwards. But he perceived that I was of an energetic nature, and having tried to frighten me by bluffing me, he preferred to come to terms. Breakfast at Ventersburg, where my cart had hardly settled itself, when a young man brought me a magnificent leg of mutton and some fresh milk. This spontaneous hospitality when nothing is asked for is a very charming characteristic of the Boer. Travelling is a necessity, and he aids the traveller, demanding nothing in return.

*March 17.*—Arrived at Kroonstadt and found myself in the midst of a council of war, where I am received with the highest consideration. The two Presidents rose



## KROONSTADT

and shook hands with me, as did Joubert. I was given a chair next to Kruger. They decide to continue the war, and exceptional measures are to be taken against the Boers who have gone home. De Wet proposed a strategical offensive movement against Bloemfontein, with the reservation, of course, that the tactical defensive should be maintained. I am appointed a general and given the command of all the Europeans, whom I am to form into a legion. They promise me everything ; they grant me all I ask. I accept this weighty charge with considerable misgiving, considering the experience I have just had of the Frenchmen. A certain number of them have simply gone off to Pretoria. I have had their supplies cut, and I shall turn them out of my legion when they appear again. Here I have begged the commissaries to hand nothing over without my signature. There are already too many abuses going on. Certain Frenchmen, even some whose social position should

## WAR NOTES

make it impossible for them to act in such a way, have provided themselves with quantities of new clothing, equipment, saddlery, horses, etc., all at the expense of Government. Having already tents and waggon loads of everything, they get themselves fed at the hotel free, and think themselves very sharp when they get everything given them, never thinking of the opinion that will be formed of their behaviour. It strikes me forcibly how many men lose sight of the military aspect of their presence here, behind a cloud of ideas which one would have preferred to believe to be the special property of the race of Moses, rather than that of a Christian people. We camp, and leave these cunning souls to fill themselves at the expense of the State. These difficulties which I shall have to combat are certainly more serious than any I shall have to solve in respect of the English. Some of my men demand a higher rate of pay than that for which they were engaged. Certainly

## KROONSTADT

the Jewish spirit has strange dwelling-places. I spent some time with President Kruger in his magnificent presidential railway carriage, where his very charming physician, Dr. Heyman, supplied us with Rhine wine. The President said to me: "All the Europeans claimed your appointment as commandant for themselves, but I am very pleased, especially as it is France which receives the honour of the appointment." President Steyn, after having said adieu, sent for the French military attaché to tell him how pleased he was to have me with him.

*Sunday, March 18.*—Talked with various people, among others, some Germans, and Count Wrangel, all of whom wish to join me. I dine with some Hollanders, attachés, and Transvaal officials. My toast of Queen Wilhelmina a great success. Long conversation with the son of Mr. Fischer, member of the executive, which is very disturbing to Demange's idea of what is correct.

## WAR NOTES

He doesn't know that there is no such thing as correctness out here. Fischer promises me all the horses I want.

*March* 19. — Long conversation with President Steyn, who was very obliging. I ask:—1. To have a legion formed of the various Europeans in the laagers. 2. To allow Africanders to join it. 3. Some telegraphists. 4. A dynamite cart in case the one from the Transvaal is delayed. All granted; he will see to it. M. Coleman will see about the Africanders, and promises me thirty Boers. I hope I have got one hundred picked horsemen. I don't want more to begin with. The attachés dine with me.

*March* 19.—The re-organisation goes on; the corps as constituted continue to arrive. I have formed a special train, which I am sending with Count Wrangel to get the Germans and Americans at Pretoria as well as my dynamite waggon. I certainly have

## KROONSTADT

as A.D.C. an officer who is the least suited in the world for the post—a regular drag on the coach, a mass of laziness and incapacity in every way, except when it is a question of getting something from which he hopes to benefit. These country louts are certainly extraordinarily cunning. There is a continual flood of denunciation from all the adventurers under my orders, who are perpetually accusing one another of all possible tricks and thefts. When I have commanded this crew after the foreign legion, I shall be truly a leader of bandits. Will they fight? That I shall learn. It is impossible to form an estimate of the force. If I get out of the affair with success, it will be because God is merciful. Joubert has come back, and visits the positions to-day with the President. They say to-day that General Gatacre has been taken prisoner by Grobeler on his way from Norval's Pont, and that the English are sending 16,000 men to meet the latter. All is dark regarding the situation of the English.

## WAR NOTES

*March 21.*—I try to buy a horse, and they bring me a horrible-looking animal, which ambles along Boer fashion, but which I buy, as it appears strong and has good legs. It had been used by the despatch riders. Commandant Smoremborg brings me the corps of Hollanders with colours flying. I inspect them and give them an address. Appearance generally good. However, after having seen something of them I shall know what they are worth. I am waiting for men, and have enough of them, but no horses or material. Got rid of my report to the President; half the day lost translating it. This is the country of putting off till to-morrow. Coleman is raising his corps of Africanders, and has left for Winberg, where they have what they call the front, *un front un peu honteux je suppose.*

*March 22.*—*Écrit à la reine de Hollande.* That unlucky Demange has had a series of misfortunes. First of all, his European

## DYNAMITE AND HORSES

servant breaks his leg tumbling down the staircase in the hotel; then his mules, which were put with the Government ones, have been requisitioned by the artillery; and, finally, he discovered that a fellow guest, a Hollander employed by the Transvaal Government, had drunk at the expense of the attachés an unheard-of amount of Château Lafitte and Moët, which brought his account up to an enormous figure. I made a pressing demand upon the Government for dynamite and horses. The President and Mr. Judge are very civil and promise everything. I leave Coleman to hurry matters on, and go home to arrange for twenty-nine Frenchmen and ninety Hollanders. Amidst all this disorder, I have got the very minimum of what I want.

*March 23.*—At nine o'clock nothing had arrived. I passed my time signing requisitions for the Frenchmen, who haven't got a single thing which they do not want changed.

## WAR NOTES

They were scarcely arrived in the country before the whole of their equipment required renewing. Some of them established themselves at Kroonstadt in the most luxurious fashion, as if they were going to live there for the rest of their lives, and only take trouble to get out of being obliged to march. Others exhibit the most helpless goodwill in their endeavours to extricate themselves from all the difficulties of possessing a horse, which they either lose or lame, a saddle, ammunition, etc. They have been a heavy source of expense to the two Republics, and I am not clear what service they have rendered. Meanwhile I make a poor figure of a general, without a staff officer or even an orderly to go out with me. The Government is at the end of its resources; everything is lacking, even the simplest necessities; there are no arms, hardly any cartridges, no saddlery. Things are going badly, and, however energetic one may be, one is apt to give way in the midst of this



## NO DRIVER

universal break-up. The dynamite is just arriving from Pretoria, but the cart which is to carry it has disappeared. I have got twenty-six horses instead of sixty, not a single boy or store, and I fear that I only delay matters by making a fuss. The men whom they tell off to me are some of them far away, others never turn up. Pretoria keeps a good many of them under the pretext of reorganising them. It is the end, there can be no possible doubt; but I fear it may be even a more miserable end than I expected. As far as I am concerned, the Europeans are in the same position as the Boers. In spite of the almost insane reduction that has been made in what I want, we cannot get away because they cannot find the driver of the cart. I asked for sixteen natives for the led horses for the raid and for the sound horses at the dépôt. I have not got one single man. I have left out the led horses, which is dangerous. Only four will be led by the mounted men. I give up the dépôt alto-

## WAR NOTES

gether. That the fate of my expedition should depend upon finding a wretched native has exasperated me to such a pitch that I cannot sleep. At the station there was a train crowded with Boers who were leaving General Delarey because he refused them leave to go home. One really asks, if they knew what war was, how the Boer generals would do under such circumstances. Mr. Reitz informs me that they are going to put some Boers under my orders. I fancy that, making full use of their rights as free men, they won't remain with me long. However, there are a few left who wish to fight. Those who remain behind have their reasons for wishing to remain and get fat until the end of the war. I have proposed to Pretoria that they should cut off all supplies four days after they get the order to rejoin.

*March 24.*—I have handed the command to the Russian colonel, Maximoff, who seems

## DRIVER FOUND

to me to wish to distinguish himself by asking for as much as possible from the Government. I have also attached to him a Hollander, M. de Bruyeres, who has been sent to me as a secretary. He is a Government employé, and I trust he will act as a restraining influence on Maximoff. It has been a terrible day for Mr. Herzog's (the judge) office. They have been very good in getting me mules, drivers, etc., all of which are taken away or disappear as quickly as they are given. One can almost say that the office has been on horseback all day long. My driver for my dynamite cart was finally discovered among a lot of Kaffir prisoners taken at Kimberley. The day went by in alternate phases of hope and despair. I have got twenty new horses, and they give me hope that I shall get my boys to-morrow, and a small police force to prevent the Boers from robbing me of them. I have got the cart loaded with dynamite cartridges of different kinds. We nearly

## WAR NOTES

came to grief again, as a fool of a commissary fell out with the driver of the dynamite cart. The question of money is also troublesome. I prefer to have nothing to do with it, as one knows what talk there has been of the way officials make money. I would have preferred simply to have issued requisitions to the landrosts for what I want. In the meanwhile they give me a cheque at the last minute, which was embarrassing, but which I got eventually changed for English money. All this time my detachment saw the stars gradually rising without being able to get away.

*March 25.*—We got off after a good one and a half hours' delay. First one thing and then another, until we started at 8.30 instead of 7. The night was dark, with occasional showers of rain. The order of march was well kept throughout the night, as it was very necessary to keep close together. Sometimes the road disappeared; then we

## AN UNDISCIPLINED TROOP

had to stop and get information at the nearest farm. At daybreak we were facing east instead of west. I went with Bréda to a farm to make inquiries. The inhabitants do not understand a word of English, but I found out where we were by signs, and discovered that we must go back four miles to find the main road, and that we should not reach the store at Smaldeel before evening. We started again at eleven o'clock. The latitude allowed on the march soon caused the whole body to scatter and then to come up at full gallop. Even some of the Frenchmen fired at a herd of buffaloes or bison. They belonged to a Boer who kept them in a sort of park near which we hoped to stop for the night. I repressed as soon as possible all this indiscipline, and after the midday halt the corps was reformed and marched with greater regularity, occasionally trotting. The necessity of keeping together was all I tried to get into the heads of my improvised soldiers. At six o'clock

## WAR NOTES

we were still two short hours from Smal-deel, and we bivouacked near a farm enclosure. A large amount of forage was distributed (four bundles a horse), and some sheep were procured. It is already clear that, from climatic reasons (sickness is due to prolonged residence in high altitudes and the sudden alternation of heat and cold), the endurance of horses and men is limited, and I shall be lucky if I can carry out my plan at all. Any way, it will take longer than I thought.

*March 26.*—The usual struggle with Boer inertia. They have overloaded the carts carrying the dynamite. The Boers are naturally casual. Every house becomes a halting-place, and the march is proportionately delayed. They go off to get a glass of milk, some bread, anything in fact, the only thing which does not interest them is the necessity for us to get on with the march. As a result, we have to camp at

## LEAVE FOR HOOPSTADT

a so-called tributary of the Wet, which quite upsets my ideas of cartography or of the direction of Hoopstadt. I sleep well in spite of B.'s snoring. I have to leave his neighbourhood and sleep near a boy who coughs violently.

*March 27.*—Affairs move so slowly that I decide to go myself to Hoopstadt to-day with Coleman and the Boers, so as to make the necessary preparations for the column, which can only arrive to-morrow. I hope to find horses, information, a guide, forage, provisions, in fact all that is necessary. I hand the command to Commandant Smoremberg, with two Boers as guides. We ride through a cloud of locusts, which follow and surround us, and cover the ground round the store where we stop to feed our horses and to refresh ourselves with excellent coffee and milk presented to us by the proprietor, a Boer. A cart arrives with the landrost of Hoopstadt,

## WAR NOTES

Dr. Baumann, who provides me with valuable information and promises me everything I want—horses, guides, food, and finally the kindly hospitality of his house. He is a friend of Coleman's, which makes him the more civil. From every point of view the landrosts play a most important part, for it is they who are able to place the resources of the country at the disposal of the army. They are not only intelligent and able, but are also courteous and capable of taking a large-minded view of affairs. I explain to the landrost my fears as to the choice of the line of the Vaal as a line of operation by the English against the Transvaal in the same manner as they have used the Modder in operating against the Free State. He replies that the same idea has struck him. My reconnaissance will at all events have this result, that it will clear up the situation as regards the strategy to be employed in future operations, whether the strategic advance is to



## BOER KINDNESS

be by Kimberley and the Vaal; by the Modder, Koodoosrand, and Bloemfontein; or, finally, by Colesberg and Bloemfontein. The head of our column arrives as we leave the store. I make the acquaintance of General Bredakamp, who served with Cronje. The march continues rapidly in spite of the great heat; 42° in the shade. At 12.30, halt. I appreciate the kindness of the Boers and the attention shown to me. There is competition as to who shall take care of my horse, bring me milk, coffee, etc. Like them, I only take such liquid refreshment as milk, coffee. One does not even think of solid food. We have marched fifty-three miles from 7 A.M. to 7.30 P.M., having off-saddled three times and halted twice, once for about an hour and once for nearly two hours. We fed the horses twice and watered once. The horses are in good condition, and move quickly. None of them appear to be exhausted by the march. At the Wet,

## WAR NOTES

the last halt, a Boer offered us some milk. The man was a fat, flabby creature with his face all swollen by bee stings, while his daughter possessed a sort of Raphaelesque beauty. Such was the contrast between parent and daughter that the mysteries of paternity appeared to me to be more insoluble than ever.

*March 29.—(The first eighteen lines are illegible.)* Presently three carts arrive, one with the landrost Baumann, and another which brings the Baron van de Dam, who is warmly recommended to me by my brother. He is a former officer of the Dutch cavalry. With him is the Irish M.P., Michael Davitt, who protested against the iniquity of the English Government as regards the Boers, and who resigned his seat in Parliament. In the store we had a conversation as to the best manner to assist the Boers, and to raise some demonstration in France in their favour. I was

## OPINIONS

in the presence of two men who were determined to succeed, but I resolutely put aside any idea of trusting to any diplomatic incident which could involve the French Government, such, for instance, as the despatch of a ship under the French flag carrying armed combatants. With a degraded government there are only disgrace and withdrawal to be expected as the finish of any diplomatic incident, and I have had enough of that, for it is France who always suffers (*encaisse le soufflet*). I hoped that the fortune of war would be with the Boers, and that they would triumph if they held out; and I pointed out that Joubert's death, regrettable as it was to lose such a man, who loved France sincerely, was not, properly speaking, a military loss; while the nomination of Botha would give a fresh impetus to the operations, and would renew confidence among the Boers. The idea that it was necessary that the Boers should take the offensive had my fullest approval.

## WAR NOTES

As it appears that the contingents coming from France are very varied as regards their military value, I suggested making an appeal to men who had formerly served with me. A thousand of these should be enlisted; a ship should be hired to convey them, completely equipped, except as to arms (excepting only a small bayonet); they should disembark at Lorenzo, and should proceed in small parties to Pretoria, where I would take command of them. I entered into minute details as to mobilisation and conveyance, and estimated the cost at —. It is for the Government to say if it can furnish the money. We then discussed at length the possibility of European intervention, and we agreed as to the benevolent neutrality of the German Emperor, who can only be a gainer by any humiliation England may suffer, even if he does not succeed in getting a portion of Mozambique. Putting on one side any initiative on the part of France, as she has

## HOOPSTADT

no government, I gave my opinion that any move on the part of Russia would, for diplomatic reasons, involve us (France). Intervention will come if we can only hold out. England will be drained of men and money. Therefore we should rely on obstinately maintaining the struggle. I handed to Mr. Davitt, who returns to France, an appeal to my old soldiers, to which I have no doubt they will respond.

*March 31.*—I send my guests off to Kroonstadt; M. van de Dam will meet me there on my return. I remain and wait for the horses promised by the landrost, who went off in the night. These disagreeable incidents only happen to Europeans. Arrive Hoopstadt 6 P.M. M. Vels has collected a fine lot of horses for the remaining Hollanders. I dine with him, and he brings me a telegram from President Steyn, who has the kindness to inform me, before publishing the official news, of the victory

## WAR NOTES

General De Wet has won at Brandfort. Six guns and waggons taken from the English. This event was necessary to show we are alive. For the future they will realise we mean to fight on. It is for me now to prove it.

*April 1.*—A visiting evening—invited to dine with M. Vels, whose kindness and consideration are unrivalled. He has bought us some capital horses, but the stupidity of the Hollanders as regards horses will prevent our getting any advantage from this piece of good fortune. I ask him to add a few horses of less value to lead. He kept a very good horse for me. My own, which is badly lame, must remain behind. Departure was fixed for two o'clock. We leave Hoopstadt somehow or other. Before reaching the river a horse bolts, and we have to walk. Passing the ford, the column gets into complete disorder. Finally, we begin to trot very quietly, and then what a scene! The led horses

## MISFORTUNES

get loose, saddles turn, everything is upset, and the unfortunate riders come to grief. I wait on the road with the guide. My led horse deposited everything in the dust—sugar, boxes of preserves, etc. The disaster is complete as far as our stomachs are concerned. It is pretty complete for me too, when I think of the cavalry I am about to lead against the English. We made little progress that night; even at a walk there were accidents. One Hollander went back to Hoopstadt because his saddle turned. There may have been more. I paid no more attention to them, as I knew pretty well what they were worth. With a few exceptions, they should all have been dismounted, the men put in a farm, and the horses led. I offered to arrange this, but a feeling of *amour propre* prevented them from accepting. I shall be very much surprised if any of them appear in action; they are a lot of grocers, not soldiers. During the long halt from 8 P.M. to 1 A.M., in spite of the trees

## WAR NOTES

to fasten horses to, at the start two men had lost their horses, and this was quite sufficient reason for these excellent fighting shopkeepers to go to sleep again and to refuse to start until they had had their coffee. If this goes on, it is perfectly useless to march at night and to hide during the day, by way of keeping up the secrecy of the affair. At 6.30 we bivouacked in a fold of the ground near a deserted farm where there was water to wash in and willows to give shade. The professional stragglers came up at a gallop like a lot of schoolboys out for a holiday. The information I receive regarding the English at Boshof confirms me in my intention of attacking them. At all events, it will enable me to get rid of my Hollanders, whom I can send back to Hoopstadt with my prize, if I am successful. As for the others, it will stir up their blood, and perhaps they will go on without thinking so much of their own comfort. I start at 5 P.M.



## INTENTIONS

*April* 3.—Interview with Field Cornet Daniell, an intelligent and agreeable man, who speaks English well and is anxious to be of use. I explain to him my wish to attack Boshof *en route*, and to profit by the attack to move on the object I have in view, distracting the attention of the English. I ask him besides for a guide to the Modder. I should have liked to have started this evening; but as arrangements have to be made with the Boers, and I know how long it takes them to make up their minds, I put it off till to-morrow evening, on the excuse that further information regarding the position of the English at Boshof is desirable, and we agree to meet at my camp. A further meeting with several field cornets. They withhold their consent to my plan, on the pretence that at a place called Lesfontein, between Boshof and Kimberley, there may be an English camp. This camp, if it exists, can only affect me as I advance in that direction (any way it would not move in the

## WAR NOTES

night); but it makes the Boers uneasy, as they would have it in their rear. However, I hope I have convinced them, having taken everything on myself and only leaving them the runaways to deal with. A proposition was made for delay to get further information, but I replied: "To-morrow, or not at all." As a fact, I shall either give up the idea of surprising Boshof, or I shall pass between Boshof and Kimberley, relying on my invisibility for safety.

*April 4.*—Departure fixed for four o'clock, *vide* operation orders. The Boers declare that twelve miles from Boshof there are 7000 English infantry who come from Warrenton. After agreeing to take a small part in the attack, they produce this story. The gentleman who is responsible for it assures me he has seen them. They all offer to go and verify the tale, but as the reconnaissance would last until to-morrow, and as in my case I start at four o'clock, they

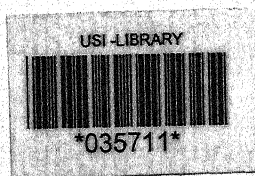
## DIFFICULTIES

would get out of coming with me. I cannot conceive how the Boer generals get their men to follow them; no matter how easy I make things, I can never start them off. The field cornet understands well enough, and seems to be doing something. It seems to be a matter with them of tradition and principle. As for the Hollanders, they have lost nine horses, which, counting the four lost yesterday, dismounts five of them. I say they will have to go on, on foot. Their unfortunate commandant, completely demoralised, explains to me that from a feeling of comradeship the rest of them will demand to be left behind for fear their friends should be taken prisoner. I limit myself to pointing out that his corps will come out of the affair with discredit, and that if I have to go on with the expedition with the Frenchmen only, I shall on my return make an example of the deserters. That seemed to impress him somewhat; as for me, I wish they (the Hollanders) would all go to the devil.

## WAR NOTES

*Here end the War Notes of Colonel de Villebois-Mareuil. The Colonel, whom Mr. Kruger had made a General on March 19th, went on a last reconnaissance on April 5th. As his small body of French and Dutch volunteers drew near to Boshof, with the object of examining the positions of Lord Methuen, against whom Colonel de Villebois-Mareuil was planning an important attack, it was suddenly surrounded by a superior force of British troops. Summoned to surrender, he refused, and after a stubborn defence, was killed.*

THE END



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